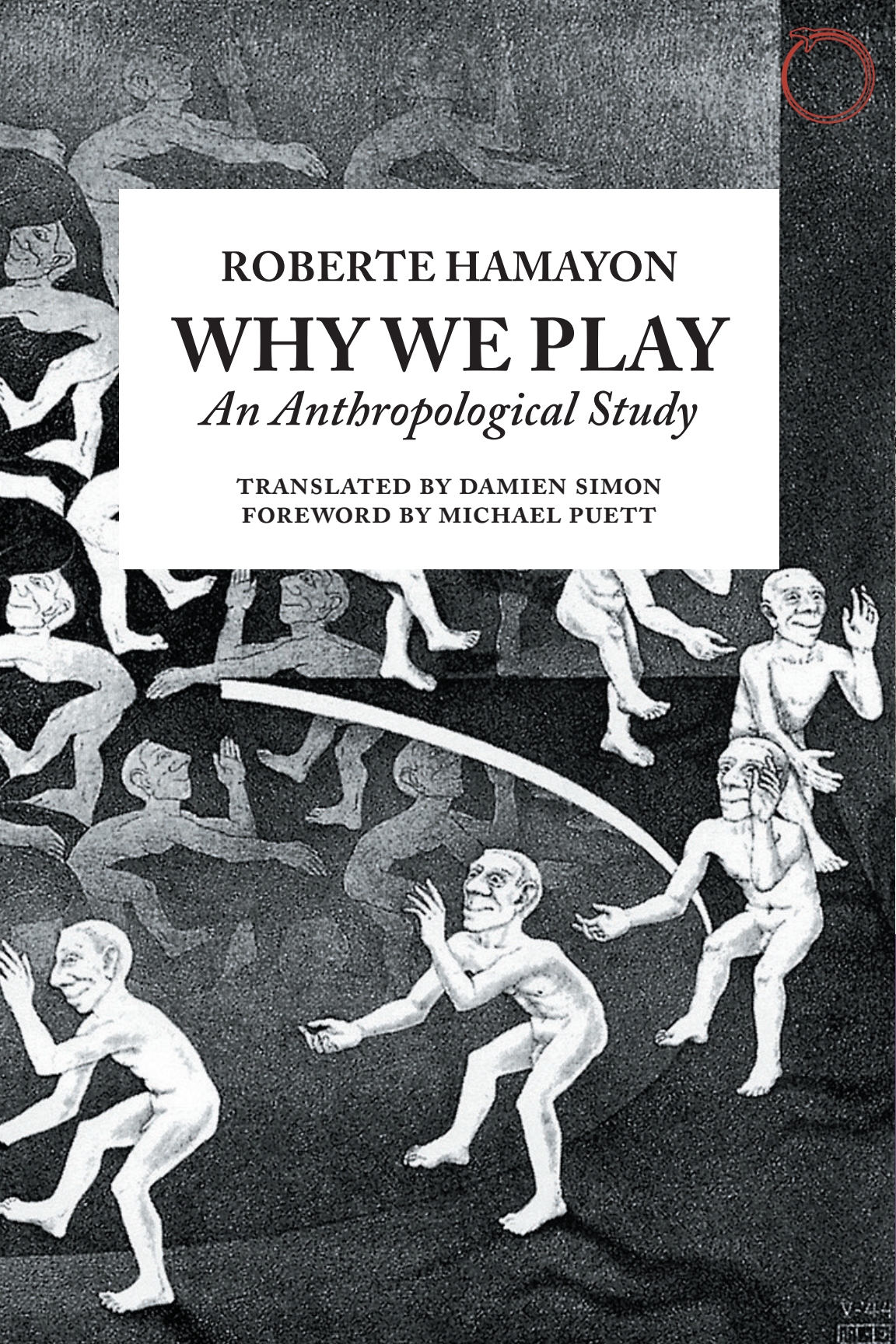

ROBERTE HAMAYON

WHY WE PLAY

An Anthropological Study

TRANSLATED BY DAMIEN SIMON
FOREWORD BY MICHAEL PUETT

WHY WE PLAY

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WHY WE PLAY
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY

Roberte Hamayon

Enlarged Edition

Translated by Damien Simon

Foreword by Michael Puett

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I alone am responsible for this book's mistakes.

Roberte Hamayon

FOREWORD

In praise of play

Michael Puett

Always contextualize. Always historicize. Always focus on the particular and the specific. These have become basic mantras in cultural anthropology, as well as the humanities in general. And with these mantras have come a deep suspicion of wide-ranging comparative studies, and in particular a deep suspicion of the general categories that undergird such comparative work. Terms like myth, ritual, and sacrifice have come to be treated with wariness—as remnants of an earlier anthropology that had not yet shaken off its ethnocentric biases.

This turn to contextualized studies, this focus on indigenous terminologies, has been crucial for the field. But the concurrent suspicion of comparative studies and comparative categories has come at a great cost. Long gone are the generalist studies that would define a topic—say, the gift—and then explore the complexities of that activity through a comparative study of the different modes in which it has appeared across cultures. Such studies are now often seen as inherently ethnocentric, since the categories are seen as being defined with implicit reference to a dominant (usually Western and usually Christian) culture, with the preconceptions of that culture then being superimposed on very different practices.

This is one of the reasons Roberte Hamayon's *Why we play: An anthropological study* is such an exciting and important study. Hamayon happily takes what

she calls a generalist approach—the approach that defined the great works of classical anthropology like Mauss' *The gift*, or Hubert and Mauss' *Sacrifice*. The approach, in other words, that is now so rare.

Hamayon certainly agrees that the categories we have inherited from these classical works need to be rethought. Yet, her response is not to reject generalist categories per se but rather to argue that we need a new one: play.

As she argues so persuasively, play has often occupied a minor role in anthropological theorizing—even in the heyday of generalist, cross-cultural studies organized around themes. Play has been deemed the non-serious activity performed by children, or by adults in their leisure. Even if we do look at play, it has typically been seen as simply a less serious form of ritual. A lesser cousin, in other words, to the important activities that should be the focus of our anthropological analyses.

So why have we failed to bring play fully into our studies? Hamayon argues that this is based on a latent set of associations traceable back to Christianity's rejection of the Roman Circus Games and related forms of play. She then generalizes the point. Forms of religious practice that emphasize belief in a single great deity—a deity that cannot be imitated, represented, played with—also entail a rejection of play. The field of anthropology, she argues, implicitly carried on these same biases when we focused all of our energies on ritual at the expense of play, on the *agon* of the gift as opposed to the play of gift-giving.

To break down these biases, Hamayon begins her study with indigenous notions of play. Hamayon is one of the world's leading authorities on the Buryat, and she accordingly begins her study here. Through a beautiful series of analyses, Hamayon explores Buryat understandings of play, Buryat performances involving play, and the significance of paradox in Buryat practices.

These notions then become the basis for her larger theoretical and comparative discussions—discussions that range across historical and ethnographic materials and even include studies in cognitive science. One of the aspects that makes Hamayon's work so compelling and so powerful is that she insists on the full implications of her generalizing approach: the play of children, the play of a shaman, and the play of gift-giving are all treated as various manifestations of a comparable way of acting in the world.

The resulting analysis proves, ironically (although one is tempted to say predictably), that it is precisely by *not* undertaking comparative studies that we are most at risk of recapitulating our ethnocentric biases. It is on the contrary through generalizing works such as these that we begin to alter our

understandings. When reading Hamayon, one feels the excitement that earlier generations must have felt when reading the great works of Mauss: through the generalized lens of a comparative anthropology, one reads basic practices in new ways.

So what happens when we take such a generalist approach to play? What happens when we see play not as a poor second cousin to ritual but rather as a fundamental way of human acting in the world? When we develop an anthropology that takes paradox and play as a starting point, rather than as a secondary object of analysis?

Beginning with the Buryat material, and then continuing from a comparative perspective, Hamayon notes the overriding significance of the body in everything from etymologies of the notion of play to the practices of play themselves. She then develops a conceptual vocabulary to analyze the complexity of these embodiments. Play, she argues, is a fundamental way of interacting with the world, involving a fictional framework with values and possibilities different from empirical reality. The dimensions of play are then analyzed through the operations of imitation, abstraction, and inference—operations through which humans develop the dispositions and attitudes required of particular modes of being.

The resulting exploration forces a rethinking of the seemingly more serious activities of ritual or prayer or sacrifice. Far from being a less serious version of the same sort of thing as prayer and sacrifice, it turns out that play involves fundamentally different types of activities, implying different types of relationships.

Take, for example, Hamayon's reading of shamanic acts. By imitating the movements of animals, shamans create a frame within which they also grant existence to the relevant animals spirits. Within this frame, the shaman interacts with spirits in relationships of partnerships, albeit with the shaman as the more active partner. This is contrasted with the purely hierarchal relationships created through prayer and sacrifice.

And this is also why, as Hamayon argues, play pleases the spirits but displeases God. Play builds a homology between humans and immaterial entities—something unacceptable to religions defined by a transcendent, non-imitable deity. Hence the Christian opposition to play as being anything other than children's games or adult leisure—an opposition, as we have seen, that leaked into anthropological theorizing as well.

Hamayon's readings also force us to see other dimensions of the activities that have become classical examples in the annals of anthropology. Take the gift.

Since Mauss we have focused on the *agon* of the gift, on the endless competitive acts of gifting in order to best an opponent or render him submissive: the hierarchies created through the potlatch, the big men of the *moka* exchange, the ranked relationships resulting from the *kula* ring. But missing in such accounts is the play that underlies the practice of gift-giving. We have explored only one dimension of the gift, and missed so many others.

Or take luck. Techniques of dealing with indeterminacy and randomness involve an inherent element of play—something that can be traced through activities as seemingly diverse as hunting and divination. Hence the decision by the medieval Church in France to forbid games of chance: again, the displeasure that God has with play. Looking at play opens new ways of thinking about practices that we have long known about but never explored fully.

Or drama. Or even fiction itself. The list goes on. One of the exciting aspects of Hamayon's work is the sheer volume of activities that we are asked to think anew once we start exploring the worlds of play.

Underlying all of these examples is the notion of play as a form of reciprocal interaction in which relationships to alterity are developed and worked upon. Suddenly, we have a new set of dimensions of human activity to analyze. Instead of rejecting our generalist categories of ritual and sacrifice, we have another category to work with. Moreover, it is a category that forces us to rethink our other ones.

I mentioned above that the generalist approaches of classical anthropology have been criticized for being overly based on ethnocentric conceptions. This is certainly in part true, as Hamayon has argued as well. But it is also important to remember that these generalist studies in anthropology have always been based upon indigenous understandings that were then expanded into broader, comparative categories. Hubert and Mauss' study of sacrifice may, in retrospect, have been overly indebted to Christian understandings. But it was a study based primarily upon Sanskrit theories. And the same can be said of all the major comparative studies of anthropology: the goal was always to begin from indigenous understandings and build comparatively from there to develop larger theoretical perspectives.

Hamayon is arguing that we need to return to such approaches. The way to develop our generalist theories is to develop them further, as we continue our exploration of indigenous understandings. The way to develop our generalist categories is to develop more, and to rethink our earlier categories accordingly. Hamayon has done this beautifully by beginning with indigenous Buryat

understandings, generalizing to comparable activities throughout the world, and from there rethinking our larger anthropological categories in general.

And, as we develop our theories in a world of indeterminacy, play offers a powerful way of thinking about the work we are trying to do.

Play, in short, is an inherent dimension of human activity, and one that anthropology needs to start taking very seriously.

Map of ethnic groups and geographic regions discussed in the text.

INTRODUCTION

"Playing"
A bundle of paradoxes

> The essence of play is paradox itself.
>
> – Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an ecology of mind*[1]

> My contribution is to ask for a paradox to be accepted and tolerated and respected, and for it not to be resolved.
>
> – Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and reality*

This book begins in an atmosphere of paradox. As if play and paradox were inseparable. Paradox, first of all, regarding my chosen field as an anthropologist: the Mongolian and Siberian region. The vocabulary of "play" is omnipresent in the ritual life there, but ethnography shows little interest in the notion. This explains, in the following pages, the process of research that led me to study play as such. Various paradoxes, too, at a more general level. The sheer diversity of games is immense, as we all notice every day; this is adequately reflected in the multiplicity of angles used to deal with them. But every expert study stumbles

1. Correcting his text later on, the author adds that perhaps this paradox is crucial to evolution: "the paradoxes of play are characteristic of an evolutionary step" (Bateson [1972] 1987: 197).

over the unexpected upsurge, within the scope it has determined, of aspects it had chosen to shun, as if reminding us of the possible existence of an underlying link between them all, or as if this diversity of angles could not conceal the evidence of a certain unity of "play."

The terminology of "play" does indeed seem prone both to variable divisions of vocabulary, and to converging areas from one language and one culture to another. Is this variability a good enough explanation for the scarcity of general studies? And in return, what can be said about the lack of interest of anthropology, a field that claims to have such a wide embrace? We can also ask ourselves how the verb *jouer*, the only one to convey the notion in French, can influence or inhibit research. Paradoxical again is the common association of "play"—at least in Western languages—with leisure, amusement, or the realm of children, whereas the scrutiny of practices called "games" shows that they are often serious, sometimes restrictive and harmful, and that most of the numerous metaphorical uses of the verb refute this restrictive association, or overflow it.

All these paradoxes, either inherent to the notion of "play" or the result of exterior circumstances, need to be "accepted and tolerated, and […] not […] resolved," if, as Bateson holds, paradox is the "essence" of the notion. Obviously, what we do does not have the same meaning, whether or not we play, whether we do it "for play" or "for real," even if, in both cases, we may adopt the same behavior, for example running or laughing. However, we cannot decide if when we "play at doing" we do not "do," and when we "do" we do not play. We can both do while playing and play in a manner that leads to doing "for real." Most importantly, these unremitting back and forths between playing and doing are part of our daily experience, for we are unable to refrain from playing. Consequently, let us wager that, far from being lessened or overturned, these paradoxes will instead prove to be constituent of the very essence of "play."

CHRONICLE OF EVIDENCE

"Play" has intrigued me ever since I began working in the field of anthropology. "Games," *Naadam*, was the name of the national holiday in Mongolia, the most striking ritual element of this Soviet satellite country that I discovered at the end of the 1960s. How could the "Three Manly Games"—wrestling, archery, horseracing—solemnly "played" from July 11 to July 14 in the capital city, and in a less formal manner elsewhere (districts and municipalities) during the rest

of July, further the national cause? Before the advent of the communist regime, these Games were a major political ritual; they became the national holiday during the communist era, and have remained so ever since. Clearly, they were closer to the ancient Greco-Roman Games than to our common conception of play. For the Buryats, neighbor and kin to the Mongols living in the Lake Baikal area in southern Siberia, the "Bride's Games" were a mandatory introduction to the wedding celebrations, as described in early twentieth-century ethnographic literature, and in the epics bards still used to sing. During the ancient shamanic rituals, the shaman had to make the participants "play" in several ways, and participate himself in various "games," including the "head-butting game," where he would mimic the powerful head-butts of the great horned ruminants. Yet the same verb "to play" was used just as well for the bird during his mating dance as for the pianist, the card player, or the actor on stage. The translations invariably and unhesitatingly gave the equivalent "play" (*jouer* in French, *igrat'* in Russian). It soon appeared that highlighting a polysemy here was pointless. Under the name of "Games" that designates the holiday, wrestling stays wrestling, and racing, racing. The other autochthonous peoples of Siberia also organize their collective identity holidays around similar practices, and as such call upon a wide range of the vocabulary relating to "play." They encourage their children to train for these practices, which are also based on imitation of animal body language, and felt to contain ideal manly values. It would also be pointless to invoke cultural proximity. There are clearly, from one people to another, beyond the terminological diversity, similarities in behavior and associated values. These suggest the underlying presence of a common notion, not necessarily named as such—at least not in homogeneous fashion—but of which "play" seems to be a convenient equivalent.

I first addressed the topic of play in *La Chasse à l'âme* (Hamayon 1990a)[2] without any real intention of constructing an object of research: it was a logical consequence of the analysis of the ritual vocabulary of shamanism. During the pre-Soviet era, the shaman's body language was intended to mimic animals (two species in particular) in two interdependent behaviors: repelling the rival and attracting the female. These were the two objectives, demanding a double virility on his behalf, both combative and sexual. Back then, I did not know that Freud had singled out aggressiveness and sexuality as the two sources of inspiration for wit—in the form of hostile and obscene wit, respectively—and that he saw

2. As well as in several articles (Hamayon 1989, 1992a, 1992b, 1995).

in the practice of wit a development of play (Freud [1905] 1993: 138). The fact remains that the aggregation of these two manly conducts within the Siberian Games showed their interdependence regarding the function of perpetuating the self. Herein lay the source of their power to represent identity. Since the participants had to wrestle and dance while modeling themselves on the same animal activities, the understanding of the autochthonous verbs for "playing" verbs fitted easily with those for "fighting" and "frolicking," which also suited animal behavior. But was it possible to further our research by taking literally the verbs signifying "to play" in order to name the ritual act itself?

I took that leap during a symposium on the subject of ritualization which gathered together anthropologists and ethologists (Hamayon 1995). If some "games" could have properties usually specific to rituals in Siberia, was it the same elsewhere? In many descriptions, "game" featured as a literal translation of an autochthonous term referring to a ritual or a ritual episode, but this fact was then blurred in the analysis. Why was that term so often judged awkward or unimportant in such a context, as if a link between the solemnity of the ritual and the casualness of the game could not or should not exist? As we asked this question, the extent of the main factor underlying this concealment would become apparent: the chronic condemnation, in the Christian Western world, of all that is play and game. Triggered by the fathers of the church and relayed by all the centralizing powers, this condemnation took twelve full centuries to produce its effect. Its history suggests that it was by separating games from one another—and, more precisely, by separating combat games from other types of games—that these powers were able to depreciate the common conception of "play." "Play" found itself hereby downgraded to something frivolous and futile, insignificant, and suited for children. In the meantime, combat games developed separately under different names: military art, then sports. It appeared, therefore, that the question I used as a title for an article I wrote in 1995, limited to Siberian data—"Why do 'games' please the spirits and displease God?"—needed to be asked at a more general level.

This depreciation of play, common to most centralizing powers, hints at the potential impact of the notion. "Playing," within the framework of Siberian and Mongolian collective rituals, did indeed imply a homology between humans and the immaterial entities supposed to hold their sources of subsistence which placed them in a partner/opponent relationship (Hamayon 2001a). And it is precisely the egalitarian nature of the playing relation that upsets the hierarchical structure of the centralizing power that crowns society. Furthermore, owing

to the latitude required for its fulfillment, play conflicts with the normative trait of a centralizing system. To maintain itself, the latter must exclude all that is imponderable from collective demonstrations. Our analyses confirm that it really was the nature of "play," and of the acts performed as such, that motivated the church's hostility, rather than the pagan belief that a ritual "game" could, for instance, make the rain fall. For the church also needed the believer to actually believe. However—and here lies an irony within our mental mechanisms—it is the ability to make the subject "knower and dupe at once," according to Johan Huizinga's expression ([1938] 1949: 23), that religious belief may have in common with the "entry into the game" (etymology of "illusion"). Whether he plays or whether he believes, by definition, the realm he enters into hereafter differs from empirical reality.

Before following this path, I had to widen my search base. This was the goal of a fruitful collective work, the results of which are compiled in *Jeux rituels*.[3] For my part, the analysis of data originating from the Tungusic and Turkic branches of the Altaic family, alongside the data already collected from the Mongolian branch, would enable me to establish the presence of the "play" notion within the ritual vocabulary of the entire area (Hamayon 1999–2000: 11–45). All the Tungusic groups claim that they have to "play" to live, and so that nature can live again. And the Turkic world (including Islamized Central Asia) uses the same root *-oy*, "play," all across its vast area, to say: to mimic animals, to dance, to wrestle, to jump, to provoke someone else, to enjoy oneself, or even to carry out a ritual act. However, meaningful historical and contextual variations began to appear. For instance, the Buryat use of "play" slowly shifts, during the twentieth century, from dance to sports. At the same time in Central Asia, ritual "play" often includes both a shamanic armed struggle against the spirits and a Sufi round dance, but without the shaman dancing, and without anyone else but him fighting. While both these gestural behaviors belong to the "play" kind in the ritual context, this does not apply to singing, nor to instrumental music, which become independent in the prevailing Muslim culture. To summarize, in the understanding of ritual "play" in the Altaic world, a certain primacy was granted to gesture at the expense of sound and voice accompaniment. Tracing further, from various perspectives, the reach of this primacy in three more

3. This volume is the journal issue 30–31 of *Études mongoles et sibériennes* (1999–2000). Later, several researchers investigated this theme further in their own work; I express my debt here.

studies (Hamayon 2003, 2006, 2008), I noticed that the gestural component was an essential frame for the "effect" expected of the ritual "play" on the renewing of nature, the success of the hunting season, or the recovery of an ill person.

So that play may have such an effect, one must believe in it. A study carried out in the meantime on the notion of belief (Hamayon 2005b) led me to spontaneously adopt the parallel between the player's and the believer's attitude, whether the object of belief is religious or not. In the believer's commitment, doubt—a core part of the attitude of belief—plays a part similar to indeterminacy in a game, which explains the variations in a player's commitment. Doubt stretches out in a continuum from a pole of compliance to a pole of detachment. Sliding from one pole to the other, both the believer's doubt and the player's variable involvement become, in a way, the driving forces of a speculative movement that pushes them forward. This accounts for how the "entry into the game" (the *illusio*), on the one hand, and the will to believe, on the other, are linked to an enigmatic and immaterial good called "luck" in some contexts (Hamayon 2012d), "grace," "destiny," "fortune," and "happiness" in others, or, in other contexts still, "godsend" and "providence," for instance. This kind of immaterial good differs from randomness by predicating the existence of an exterior "other" endowed with intentionality.

Finally, these Games seem incompatible with the common understanding of the notion: far from being a gratuitous and free amusement, they *had to have* a positive "effect" on the state of things to come, which is why participation was *mandatory*. They aimed for action more than distraction. They were not the result of individual initiatives. They expressed a social obligation and a cultural bias.

OUTLINE OF MY APPROACH

Convinced that a study of the Mongolian and Siberian Games could help understand what is at stake in the act of playing, I sought to renew my approach through this book. I will start, therefore, in the first part, by laying out the existing approaches. Some, the most ambitious on a theoretical level, but also the rarest, postulate a unity of play, and then classify its functions and principles. Others, more common by far, root their analysis in the immeasurable diversity of games to produce one-off specialized studies.

The first chapter will review the contributions of both types of studies. It will be spanned by this paradox of anthropology: though this field claims to be

generalizing and global in scope, the only general references for play come from elsewhere: *Homo ludens* by Johan Huizinga, published in 1938, and *Man, play and games*, published in 1958 by Roger Caillois, the ever-cited classics. Actually, most works of anthropology specialize in close but distinct notions, such as ritual and sport. Clearly, when the time comes to make of play an independent research object, there is something that repels anthropologists. The variety of forms of play obviously hinders research from the point of view of analytical precision, while instituting a theoretical challenge. However, the history of the term "play" that we relate briefly in the first chapter speaks in favor of the unity of the concept. Therefore, unlike contemporary tendencies to undertake only specialized studies, I chose to topple this perspective. I wagered on the existence of a general notion of play, dormant in our cognitive devices, and on its unity beyond the diversity of its expressions. It seemed I had to do so in order to understand why the Games I witnessed appeared to me to be sport as much as ritual and show, equally serious and joyful; and why those who participate see in them all at once a scale model of their world, their ethics, and the making of their future: obviously, there was something linking the different aspects of play together.

A second chapter will complement the scene. My ambition was to understand the depreciatory connotations tied to the notion of play that prevent it from being established as a concept and object of research. The chapter recounts the history of this depreciation, which took the Christian church more than ten centuries to impose on the Western world.[4] There is another purpose for recalling the repeated disapproval of the Roman Circus Games here. Disregarding differences of scale, the Roman Circus Games share many notable points in common with the Mongolian and Siberian public games: they, too, are totalizing collective demonstrations, strongly institutionalized, and of great importance to those who participate. However, the Circus Games did not survive the Christianization of the Roman Empire, while the Mongolian and Siberian Games retained their authority throughout the twentieth century and its regime changes. Moreover, recent history shows that the age-old depreciation of play did not impede the revival of the Olympic Games, now raised to the status of the most important international ritual of all time. Here, then, are the

4. The other world religions have also condemned, distorted, or appropriated games. For instance, in Inner Asia, Buddhism reshaped dances for them to be performed by monks within the precincts of its monasteries.

three different fates of those public demonstrations called "games," bringing together practices that overlap only slightly with what we usually understand by "game" and "play," mostly because they contradict their connotation of frivolity. This book aims to shed light on this diversity of fates through an archaeology of "play" stemming from Mongolian and Siberian games. The latter will be the cornerstone of my analysis: they are sufficiently homogeneous and delimited in time and space to authorize sound comparisons, and diverse enough to allow significant variations.

The third chapter sets out the approach I chose for this book, based not on game or games, but on "play" considered as a process. This approach is only one among several possible: it is simply the approach that forced itself upon me. To begin with, it considers "play" neither as a type of activity nor as a mode of action, but as *a modality of action*, organized or not. It is a "modality of all human activity," Émile Benveniste once wrote, in order to introduce a short and broad article dedicated to "game as a structure" (1947: 162). To address this modality of action, I will base my analysis on a *negative definition*, since "playing" does not present itself as a true "doing," but can, however—as the following will show—constitute "a kind of" doing. This starting point allows a somewhat *generative* approach to "play." However, fixing "playing" in what it is not imposes the need to consider it through each one of its numerous dimensions, which means seeing it plainly as a multidimensional phenomenon.[5]

The next chapter's objective is to present the main empirical material that will guide us through the multiple dimensions of playing: Buryat "play," the breadth of which I was convinced of by my previous works. The data summarized in this chapter will serve as a useful basis to illustrate the stages of my research. A general pattern emerges spontaneously through the variations that distinguish these examples, step by step, both in time and in space. An immediate bodily dimension surfaces: this will close off the first part. At first glance, it consists in lively recurring movements in a limited space; but it soon proves to be something other than just these simple movements. The latter, inspired by animal behavior, create a fictional framework when they are made by humans—thus endowing this fictional framework with a value of reality different from empirical reality. Two questions ensue. First of all, that of animal involvement in the conception of play (if not that of animal play, which I leave

5. This is the term Alain Caillé uses, thus renewing the notion of "total social fact" that Marcel Mauss applies to the gift (Caillé 1995: 33; [2000] 200: 63–65).

to the ethologists), practically missing from works of human science at a time of intense debate over all that likens humans and animals. Yet animal involvement can help to explain the universality of human play, a universality that none contests (and that no amount of diffusionism could account for), or addresses. Perhaps it can illuminate Huizinga's general thesis, for whom "[human] civilization arises and unfolds in and as play," whereas "play is older than culture [. . . and] animals play just like men," and explain why:

> Even in the animal world [play] bursts the bounds of the physically existent, [. . . it is] altogether superfluous [. . . and] breaks down the absolute determinism [; animals] must be more than merely mechanical things.[6]

Regarding this first question, the bodily dimension of the Games roots for a biological or physical foundation of play. The second question ensues from the ability that the movements performed in a playing context have to create a fictional frame. This attribute compels us to explore a second level of the bodily dimension: this is how the second part will start off. Through the fictional frame it creates, it indeed appears to be the core of its other dimensions. The second part will be devoted to analyzing each one of these and their mutual links. The first dimensions to be analyzed will be mimicry, preparation, cognition, interaction, etc., which seem to ensue unavoidably given this fictional frame. Other dimensions linked to other questions will follow: for instance the relationship between playing and reality, or awareness of the game played, or even the manner in which play represents reality. Not forgetting those topics pertaining to play that are joy, luck, or cunning. Nor finally those of its competitive orientation and ritual potential, which allow play to have an impact upon political and religious spheres. I hope that analyzing these various dimensions will help broaden general thinking on the matter. Even though one or other of these dimensions may develop independently (physical games that evolve into sports, for instance), other dimensions still potentially stick to play, albeit in a concealed way. An overview of these interrelated dimensions will confirm that "play" is intrinsically multidimensional. In order to shed light on this feature, I will investigate the construction of the process of "playing," and will try to define it through its margin of realization implied by how it operates, and through

6. Huizinga ([1938] 1949, foreword: 1, 4).

its metaphorical structure, which characterizes it as an act that determines its complex relationship with reality.

This combined mode of structuring and operating turns "play" into a somewhat flexible and oblique modality of action. Perhaps this explains the paradoxical appearance of play, but also that which transforms it into a way of "doing something else, elsewhere and otherwise," in a manner indefinitely renewed.

PART ONE

From Games to Play

CHAPTER ONE

Can play be an object of research?

> The complex solution to these problems shows the play spirit is not as despicable as we would think.[1]
>
> – Diderot and d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie,* "Jouer"

"Unity of play: Diversity of games," Roger Caillois declared in English in the title of his 1957 article for the periodical *Diogenes*. Thus, he brought to light a revealing terminological distinction. Where the English language facilitates the distinction between the diversity of *games* and the unity of *play*, French blends the concept and its expressions into a single word. This difference highlights the complexity of the phenomenon, which includes so many facets that one must "call upon a complementarity of glances, stemming from various disciplinary perspectives" (Genvo 2008: 100). A breathtaking amount of studies result from this. Moreover, it dazzles me that, no matter the angle of the research, it always stumbles upon a facet it cannot grasp, often far removed from the notion most spontaneously associated with "playing" in daily life: "having fun." Here lies one of the deepest challenges of this research, torn between two positions: respect

1. "On voit par la solution compliquée de ces problèmes que l'esprit du jeu n'est pas si méprisable qu'on croirait bien."

for the apparently insurmountable differences, and the feeling that there is always a shared component explaining the use of "play."

Based on this analysis, the existing works are divided into two camps: those that tackle play in general, or those that address games in the light of specific disciplines. The generalist camp, opting for the unity of the concept, launched by Johan Huizinga in 1938, and taken over by Roger Caillois in 1958, has almost fallen into oblivion today; though there is not a single specialized work that forgets to quote them, and the trails they blazed still represent the research horizons. The much broader camp—that of breaking up the research—widely dominates, but only a few studies refrain from relying on generalizing viewpoints, while many lead to generalizing within a field, such as child psychology, mathematics, or drama studies. Besides, it is these disciplines—alongside a few others (history, ethnography, economics cybernetics)—that have ensured the presence of play and games in research over recent decades.

Within this abundant literature, I first looked for landmarks in anthropology. In principle, since this discipline prides itself on being comprehensive and all-inclusive, and seeks out those universal aspects of human activity, it should have ranked highly amongst the disciplines concerned. But the occasional encompassing attempts have not come out of anthropology; nor has the latter tried to draw from the spectacular body of resources that generations of folklorists so relentlessly put together. In its beginnings as a discipline (in France, it was then called ethnology), many authors, such as Frazer, Frobenius, and Granet, mentioned the games of the societies they studied, emphasizing that these were not mere entertainment, but played a core part in important rituals. But apart from a few welcome exceptions, this is no longer the case. Since the mid-twentieth century, anthropology has shifted its attention toward themes intuitively felt as akin to play: specifically those of sports and ritual. It neglected to follow the historians of France when they recently explored ancient holidays, a theme covered alongside games by folklorists.[2] However, games still feature among the research topics suggested to field researchers, and lead to valuable sections in ethnographic works.

In any case, in what follows, I provide only a partial and selective view of the works on play. I do not have the ambition to either encompass or synthesize them all. My purpose is rather to offer a general overview of the influential

2. Chartier and Uzielli (1980: 44–45) explain this sudden interest by an internal evolution of history as a discipline.

works concerning my approach, but without delving into detail, for subsequent chapters will provide an opportunity for further discussion on specific problems. My thought owes a little to each of these. I hope I have acknowledged my debts, but I may have passed over the origins of certain ideas, as if these had turned into anonymous certainties by dint of being used and reused from one author to the next.

CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGY'S CURIOUS LACK OF INTEREST

According to the calculation by Thierry Wendling (2002: 29), one of the only anthropologists to take an interest in games, looking at articles dealing with play in the journal *American Anthropologist* from 1888 to 2000, the decline begins in 1930 and ends with a complete disappearance from 1949 onward. More significantly than games, the notion of play is really what anthropology has neglected. This lack of interest is truly curious at a time when anthropology is increasing its focus on the similarities between humans and animals, and questioning the classical oppositions of Western thought (particularly "nature" v. "culture and "soul" v. "body"), while rekindling its comparative ambition. All the more curious given that the Olympic Games became universally popular by a name meaning "game" in all languages.

The notions of "play" and "game" are seldom acknowledged as anthropological research objects, let alone allocated an independent entry in dictionaries and encyclopedias. In its 2003 edition, the *Encyclopedia of social and cultural anthropology* ignores "game" and grants "play" little more than a page, that is, half the space given over to "food," and far less than that given to "dance" or "gender." This "play" entry is authored by Thomas Crump (2003) and refers back to the correlates "childhood" and "ritual," two of the most common stereotypes associated with the idea of playing. Moreover, Crump's bibliography regarding generalizing works only quotes those, quite old, written by Huizinga and Caillois.[3] I will have the opportunity to examine these. Pleasingly, Philippe Laburthe-Tolra and

3. His other references are Turner (1982b) and Geertz (1973), the first one selected for the state of consciousness of the player entering a game, the second for the idea that, through the cockfights they organize in Bali, the humans are actually those fighting (Crump, 2003: 424–25).

Jean-Pierre Warnier entitled "Games, thought, art" a chapter of their synthetic book *Ethnology-anthropology* (1993), in a part dedicated to the symbolic function.

Only a few anthropologists mention the importance ascribed to games by the societies they study. Among these, Anne de Sales entitles her book *I am born of your drum games* (1991), and Jarich Oosten notices, in the description of an Inuit ritual by Rasmussen, that the shaman "enjoys himself" among the dead "occupied with their games" (1989: 336). Rarer still are the anthropologists who pinpoint the existence of the concept of playing and make it the object of their research. Let us briefly introduce those I will refer to in the current study.

Thierry Wendling (2002) wrote a book about chess players. To orientate his research, he sets out three anthropological axes: rules, sociability, and culture. He ascribes great importance to rules, not really as such, but because of the way players have of granting them some reality: a rule is a social construct constantly reinvented and renegotiated, the cause of many interactions between players (2002: 45–46). The "world of chess" that players reach as they play is a separate world, in which they have to "believe"; it is characterized by specific conceptions and dictates its own temporality. Highlighting in his conclusion the "highly marked" ritual aspect of games between champions, the author finally notices in chess most of the dimensions that my own study on "play" stresses throughout the second part of this book.

For her part, Céline Petit (2009) investigates not one specific game, but all the kinds of games that the Inuit play or have played since their incorporation into the North American world, to which they have adapted them. The author does not limit herself to describing these games, but shows a playful culture. Analyzing the attitudes, emotions, and values related to these practices, she highlights the "playful" atmosphere these games create within a community, and the "positive anticipation" they create for players. The Mongol and Siberian Games will widely echo this analysis.

Because of its great anthropological reach, *The empire in games,* by historian Monique Clavel-Lévêque, also belongs here. She analyzes Circus Games in ancient Rome. This book demonstrates the existence of a constitutive interdependence between various aspects of the act of playing. Upon this interdependence rests the global function these Games accomplish: they are a "scale model" of the "renewal of the world," which explains their religious and political importance (Clavel-Lévêque 1984: 84, 107, 129). The Mongol and Siberian Games illustrate—on a smaller scale in the second part of this book—the same type of interdependence.

Even more significantly, many studies avoid using the terms "game" and "play," even if they are aware that these are the terms currently used to translate the indigenous names of the practices in question. Carlo Ginzburg, for instance, a historian receptive to anthropology, uses the title *Night battles* for his study on fertility rites assigned to the *benandanti* of the rural areas of Friuli in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The *benandanti* are believed to fight witches for their crops at night, during their sleep. Their spirits attend nocturnal gatherings disguised as animals, leaving their bodies behind. However, these nocturnal gatherings are mostly called "games," not "battles," by period sources the author quotes:

> "Vagabonds return from these games all hot and tired." "They appear together jousting and playing games." "They congregate in certain places to perform marriages, to dance and eat and drink." "They fight, play, [and] leap about." "And if we [the *benandanti*] are the victors, that year there is abundance, but if we lose, there is famine." (Ginzburg [1966] 1992: passim)

In similar fashion, Antoinette Molinié, an Americanist anthropologist, refers to "ritual battles" in her article about the Bolivian Indians' ritual of seasonal renewal (1988). Games, fights, and dances punctuate this ritual (and the same type of ritual is called "play" in nearby Ecuador). The author recognizes a proper use of game as a term, but does not transform it into a concept.

The notion of play is not truly examined either, even when it is acknowledged as the equivalent of an indigenous conception, notably so concerning possession cults. To Africanist Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, "the translation of *holle hoor*, that is to say, 'possession cult' [. . .] could in fact mean [. . .] literally [. . .] 'spirits' play'."[4] Similarly, Ioan Lewis analyzes what the Malaysians call *main peteri*, "princess play," as an exorcism ritual ([1986] 1996: 133). However, two Indianist authors—Martine Van Woerkens (1992) and Peter Van der Veer (1992)—use the vocabulary of play in the titles of articles about possession rites. There would also be numerous examples in the area of shamanism. Whereas it is common in Korea to say that spirits and shamans "play," *nolda-*, only a few authors relate it, among whom is Seong-Nae Kim (1989): a chapter of her thesis is called "Let the ancestors play."

4. "La traduction de *holle hoor*, à savoir 'culte de possession' [. . .] pourrait donc en fait être [. . .] mot à mot [. . .] 'jeu des génies'" (Olivier de Sardan 1986: 151).

UPSTREAM AND DOWNSTREAM

Anthropology's interest in the subject did not suddenly disappear around 1950; this only reflects the long political and religious denigration campaign toward play—as we will see in chapter 2. This lack of interest has not meant forsaking the phenomena studied; merely that these have been studied under the guise of notions other than play, widening the discipline's transversal notions.

TRANSVERSAL NOTIONS

Hence the development of the themes of sports and ritual in anthropological studies within the second half of the twentieth century, as if they had, each in their own way, taken over the role of play. Sports are looked upon as a regulated activity, and ritual mainly as an interaction structure. A third field expands rapidly, mainly through dance and drama, that of performance or performing arts. Though well known, their link to the notion of play is disregarded and set aside. In fact, they endlessly intermingle: sports are striking for their ritual aspect, and rituals for the elements of "performance" they include. They both express, in a certain manner, a different potentiality of the notion of play, but this common point never seems to be taken into account by researchers.

First axis: Sport as a regulated activity

Through sport as it is understood today, rules take on a great importance: every sport is defined beforehand by its rules; and these legitimate it as a rationalization of play, and as a means of promotion and professionalization for whoever makes significant efforts. Sports appeared as a healthy bodily practice at the time age-old attacks against games had managed to discredit them. Sports somehow blur the stereotypes associated with play: made to entertain, thus childish, frivolous, popular, not serious . . . And the idea that games earned recognition upon becoming sports is now commonplace.[5] Camy clearly points out that, nowadays, a game survives in its being labeled a sport, and sporting

5. Paul Yonnet (1985: 24) explains the absence in our societies of sociological works about certain games, such as horseracing by their lack of prestige: they are considered rites for "slaves and fools."

values, according to Pierre Parlebas' formula, benefit from a "mythical superiority" (1995: 32). The ideas of specialized training, of competition, and of professionalization are attached to sport, and not to game, which is only its poor relation.[6] And it truly is their concern for greater prestige that explains the impatience of chess players to have their game accepted as a sport,[7] even though chess hardly corresponds to the common understanding of sport as a "physical activity."

However, physical activity is only one component among others of sport's etymology. Entertainment is just as fundamental a notion. In the Middle Ages, the French used the verb *se desporter* as we now use "to entertain oneself." Afterward, French seemingly forgot that notion, while English kept it longer. There were two entries in Samuel Johnson's dictionary (1762) for "to sport." One was: to divert, to make merry; to represent by any kind of play; and the other: to play, to frolic, to game, to wanton; to trifle.

And in forgetting, Pierre de Coubertin's warning seems to have been blown away: after having encouraged excellence, he returns to the ideal of his famous formula: "participation is more important than winning." Even though this is recalled during the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games, the medal-hunt remains the primary concern of the participants.

However, the anthropology of sport stretches beyond the mere description of rules, as shown, for instance, by the works of Christian Bromberger (1998; Bromberger and Ravis-Giordani 1987a, 1987b). This author also investigates the athletes' attitudes, and their mutual relationships, the way they insult the vanquished by belittling their manliness. He particularly looks at the ritual hallmarks of some sports, like football. He stresses that it is a nonreligious ritual, which dramatizes the great contemporary ideological values without making them explicit. Considered in this way, sport can be analyzed across a variety of dimensions that I will identify later on in the Mongol and Siberian Games. In other words, though sport is first and foremost a game, it also shows most

6. Even though the *Oxford compact dictionary* defines game as "A form of competitive activity or sport played according to rules."

7. Wendling shows that numerous players claim a professional status today, thus imitating athletes, and that the word "championship" is now common because "chess has acquired one of the distinguishing traits of modern sports […] quantification." Recognition of chess as a sport can be seen in France by the public sponsorship of clubs. The author concludes his work by emphasizing the professional aspect: "Chess is a profession" (2002: 75, 241).

features of play, as implied by the simple fact that we say both "to play sports" and "to play games." In any case, it is not from rules that the perception of playing is formed.

Furthermore, after centuries of blurring and erasing play, is it not surprising that the West adopted the pagan expression of "Olympic Games" to change what it already called "sports" into what is today the greatest festive public event in the world? No one questions the ritual facet of this event, which glorifies national identities through physical feats. Nor does anyone contest the fact that the notion of play expresses itself easily in numerous languages; nor has there been any protest concerning the continuous integration, in this structure, of many more games . . . or sports!

Second axis: Ritual as an interactional structure

Works on ritual have their core inspiration in the notion of interaction that has pervaded almost all of the social sciences since Gregory Bateson first promoted it. This author's intellectual journey is itself quite peculiar, as he studied zoology, logic, and psychology, in a broad sense. The variety of these fields of study probably hindered his identification with one or the other, but it certainly favored the blossoming of his original and fertile ideas. In his first works, he speaks as a theoretician of interaction and metacommunication. But the publication of *Steps to an ecology of mind* shows another Bateson, inventor of the notion of the "double bind." This book positions him as a pioneer cognitivist and master of psychotherapy. Some of his ideas directly concern play: to the rigidity of "game," liable to collapse if the rules are changed, he opposes the interactivity of "play," and its ability to evolve (Bateson 1955b: §§ 23–24). My own reflection, in chapter 3, "Play defined in negative terms," stems from another of his intuitions, famous thanks to the anecdote of the "playful nip," which I will recount. In addition to the nip—the first message—comes a second message: "this is play," which acts as the frame within which the first message can be interpreted (ibid. and [1972] 1987: 183). But these two messages depend on two different logical levels. All the play frames hold this paradox, Bateson says ([1972] 1987: 183–95). My reflection bases itself on this paradox—or rather the difference between the level at which the movement looks like a bite and the level at which it claims it is not a bite. ("The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite," ibid.: 186.) Bateson himself felt that this play frame notion worked just as well for ritual as for play, which meant that

separating the two could be tedious. About a ritual occurring in the Andaman Islands, he observes:

> In the Andaman Islands, peace is concluded after each side has been given ceremonial freedom to strike the other. This example, however, also illustrates the labile nature of the frame, "This is play,", or "This is ritual." (Bateson [1972] 1987: 187–88)

However, play is neglected to the benefit of ritual by researchers who place interaction structure at the center of their investigation. Victor Turner is the first and probably most famous anthropologist to go down this route. About the time Bateson writes, Turner creates the concept of "social drama" to analyze the crises he observes among the Ndembus. To him, drama's ritual aspect can resolve conflicts and avoid them, because it constitutes a frame in which the relations are different, thus allowing controlled transformations and shifts of the social order. Turner defines the ritual as a normative order, including an "anti-structure" he calls *communitas*. This term refers to the spontaneous consensus created by the fact that the ritual enables the participants to rediscover equal relations as they shed the formal links and other category distinctions that organize daily life (Turner 1974: 45).[8] This was one of the purposes of the Roman Circus Games, which were "places of social contradiction" and of "genuine conciliation," working as a "tool for building consensus" (Clavel-Lévêque 1984: 124, 145). From another point of view, the notion of "social drama" draws Turner's and Erving Goffman's work[9] on the staging of social relations closer together, and, from another point of view still, those of Ernest T. Kirby and Richard Schechner on theatrical "performance."[10]

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8. Ritual drama's internal logic is to be "procedural" and "performative." "What have been regarded as the 'serious' genres of symbolic action—ritual, myth [. . .]—are deeply implicated in the cyclical repetitive views of social process. [. . .] Their very outsiderhood disengages them from direct functional action on the minds and behavior of a society's members" (Turner 1974: 16).
9. According to Richard Grathoff (1970), particularly in the chapter "Toward a unified theory," *game* and *play* belong to a sociology of the daily. As interaction structures, they exemplify strategies of cooperation and competition.
10. At the time, Turner presumably supported—in vain—the creation of an "ethnodramaturgy."

Bateson dedicated his first book (1936) to an Iatmul (from Papua New Guinea) ritual, the *naven*. Michael Houseman and Carlo Severi reinterpreted this ritual with Bateson's interactional method. "For us," they say, "ritualization does not determine a typology of acts but describes a particular mode of action. [. . .] It is necessary to approach ritualization in its own terms as a particular modality of action, specifically, we submit, from the point of view of the relational dynamics it brings into play" (Houseman and Severi [1994] 1998: 156). Basing themselves on Turner's notion of "symbolic condensation,"[11] they suggest that of "ritual condensation" in order to analyze the simultaneous presence, in the same sequence, of opposite relation modes. In other words, what defines ritual is that it "condensates" usually distinct interactions, and this explains why learning the ritual obeys "constitutive" and not only "normative rules." Transgressing normative rules would only mean rephrasing them. Transgressing constitutive rules would make the action they describe disappear, because "in this case, rules do not define simply the right way of engaging in a particular mode of behavior. They define, as in a game of cards, the very nature of the behavior" (ibid.: 262, 252).

In many ways, what these works assess about ritual could apply to play, which is also an interaction structure. But that would mean diminishing the differences between rite and game for lack of references to tutelary principles that could explain the forms of interaction. The prospect of interaction cannot explain, for instance, why such and such a healing ritual requires dancing. That Balinese people fight through their cockfights (Geertz 1973, see n. 3) does not explain why social antagonisms express themselves precisely through this format. But these works talk about ritual, not play. Play, therefore, seems to be the poor relation of ritual—as it was of sport. As if it lacked the "seriousness" that enables the ritual to be considered a major social institution, or the "seriousness" that Turner ascribes to stage play, as shown by the subtitle of his book *From ritual to theatre*: "The human seriousness of play" (1982a).

It is meaningful that the only works to take play as an object ask the question of its relation to ritual, some seeing it as a fallen rite, others seeing rite as sacralized play.[12] Few anthropologists have tackled it. As soon as he asks it, Michel Leiris shows it to be vain.

11. A similar idea of condensation applies to classical tragedy and the three unities rule: place, time, and action. It is close to the idea of "narrative compression" used by videogame creators and their fiction storytelling.

12. See, for example, Varenne and Bianu (1990).

> Here, between rite and play, there is no solution of continuity. Is there play as prelude of the *zâr* spirit's manifestation; is the latter a continuation of play? A behavior that first was an indistinct game using a war weapon as instrument then took shape as a convention: it became a mime of possession by warrior spirits; the war weapon played the role of a mask, of a spokesperson between the actor and the character he has to impersonate. The mechanism of ritual itself leans toward play. Sometimes, rite itself is an excuse to play. (Leiris [1938] 1980: 74, 77)

Claude Lévi-Strauss thinks there is some continuity between rite and play because they are regulated activities:

> All games are defined by a set of rules which in practice allow the playing of a certain number of matches. Ritual, which is also "played," is on the other hand, like a favoured instance of a game, remembered from among the possible ones because it is the only one which results in a particular type of equilibrium between the two sides. (Lévi-Strauss [1962] 1966: 30)

However, Lévi-Strauss clearly opposes play and rite through other angles.

The chapters analyzing Mongolian and Siberian rites will give me plenty of opportunities to further this ancient question. Asked in this manner, the question cannot find an indisputable answer, even less so than that of the relation between play and sport, and between play and drama. But, regarding all these oppositions, anthropology has chosen to limit research to the seemingly more specialized term used for each of them: rite, sport, and theater.

TOWARD COGNITIVE STUDIES

Hence, it comes as no surprise that anthropology does not feel itself involved by the consequences of the mathematical theory known as Game Theory or Theory of Games, but which actually deals with notions of strategy, and of the rationality of strategic choices. And yet this name drew the theory back to its ancient origin: indeed, it was while answering a question about how players who stop a card game before the end share their initial bet that Blaise Pascal conceived the founding principles of probability calculation.

The contributions of Game Theory have been essential to the development of economics and cybernetics, and, through the latter, of cognitive sciences. Jean-Pierre

Dupuy ([1994] 1999) highlights all that these owe to Game Theory. Games provide templates for showing the mechanisms of simulation and rational calculation. The opposing logics driving dual games, that of cooperation (within a camp) and that of confrontation (between camps), structure and deepen interactional analysis. It is baffling that other works concerning the understanding of cognitive mechanisms have had such a small response from anthropologists, particularly those regarding the meaning of play as a learning mode. On the other hand, they gave rise to a significant amount of psychological studies. These have further emphasized the association between games and childhood, even when referring to adults.

From child psychology as a cognitive structure

Child psychology was indeed the first to give an important place to the notion of play. Clearly acknowledged in ancient Greece, sporadically reasserted throughout history, and discussed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant, by the end of the 1920s the notion drew the attention of Jean Piaget. This great scholar saw in it a manifestation of the symbolic function allowing the child to construct reality, mostly in the form of "imagination games" consisting in representing something, or "pretending" to do something (Piaget 1951). In that perspective, Donald Winnicott gives a central role to the process of playing in the child's construction of reality, thus naming his book *Playing and reality* (1971).[13] This book provides the starting point of our ninth chapter, which seeks to show how "playing" in the Mongol and Siberian Games builds both identity and alterity at the same time, at individual and collective levels.

. . . and in educational and learning theories

Besides, drawing on cognitive studies, educational and learning sciences gave birth, in the Anglo-American world, to a powerful school of thought claiming to pertain to the "anthropology of play," and expressing itself, for instance, in the *Journal of Play Theory and Research*, and in the publications of the Anthropological Study of Play[14] association. This turning point bases itself on the Batesonian notion of "play frame":

13. It was translated into French by Claude Monod and J.-B. Pontalis as early as 1975.

14. This orientation provokes sporadic remarks going beyond the frame of learning, such as that on the existence of a meaningful link between interest in game and

> The main characteristic of play—whether of child or adult—is not its content but its mode. Play is an approach to action, not a form of activity.[15]

> Playing does not come under the objective features of activity, which are not specific, but comes under the manner in which this activity makes sense for an individual or within the communication between two or more individuals.[16]

However, most studies of this school of thought seem to use the idea of play only to insist on the possibilities play provides to explore, experiment, take risks, and develop one's aptitudes and creativity—since it is only a game. Seen from this perspective, play can safely risk failure concerning its creative aspect. This perspective is, after all, quite ordinary, but the idea that playing is a way of discovering the world agrees with the communal sense. Thus, educational concerns are at the heart of another school of thought built upon the notion of Theory of Play, and upon the eponymous journal. Playing allows us to naturally test our limits while suspending the constraining conditions of reality in order to imagine other paths. This is useful to the child, but also to psychotherapy. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi draws from this his inspiration for his happiness psychology: playing provides dynamism, self-confidence, and self-assurance; it is a search for the "optimal experience," "a search for enjoyment." Looked upon as the "great guru of Play Theory" and of "transhumanism," Brian Sutton-Smith (1993) sees in play a principle of "adaptive potentiation," which is the foundation of the intrinsic human capacity for self-transformation.

Other orientations are even more clearly ideological, such as those pleading for a "playful society" (i.e., some of Peter Sloterdijk's works), or such as *The play ethic* (Kane 2004), which states that consciousness of playing creates an alternate belief system, a factor of optimization. Provocative, at times seen as excesses, these orientations have fostered reactions in favor of maintaining boundaries to limit play, and a form of "play-care" to take care of those who lose.

All things considered, though, it seems meaningful that these orientations have had little or no influence in France. Addressing the French academic world, Brougère (2005) chooses a vision of play that reflects the joint influence

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interest in religion (see *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Anthropology of Play*, 1992).

15. Jerome Bruner, *Children's Play Council*, August 2001, quoted by Moyles (1989).
16. Brougère (2005), quoted by Delory-Momberger (2006: 479).

of Huizinga, Callois, and of his own language. According to him, in order for there to be play, the five following criteria must be present, the first two of which are crucial: a sign of that the activity is somewhat "offbeat"[17] compared to the activities of ordinary life (I know that "this is a game" or "this is play"); an unforced decision to enter the game ("playing is deciding to play"); the existence of shared implicit or explicit rules; an absence of consequence of the game on real life; and finally uncertainty regarding the outcome. This definition tries to encompass both "game" and "play," which the English language dissociates, though most informal games constantly blur the lines between normative and regulative rules ("we play this specific game"), and constitutive rules ("we play this game or we do not"), as Duflo writes (1997: 129–30).

It seems reasonable, therefore, to wonder what differences may stem from conducting our research in French rather than English. J.-B. Pontalis answered this question in his preface to the French translation of Donald Winnicott's book (Pontalis 1975: 8), for whom the ability to distinguish between *game* and *play* sanctions the passage into adulthood. Pontalis argues that the French language is perhaps "not that wrong," for a lack of explicit and acknowledged rules does not imply a total lack of rules, even though the player or observer may not notice this.

VARIETY OF TERMINOLOGICAL DIVISION

This difference between French and English tends to disappear here, as we are not analyzing "game" but the act of "playing," which is to say the verb. Indeed, English only uses one verb[18] for both nouns, "playing" translating the nominalized French *jouer*. This choice is not meant to shun the question of the influence of French on my reasoning. It mostly means that the verbal form obliges one to focus not on categories but on a *process*, not on activities but on ways of acting or approaches to action. Whether the activity is of the game type or of the play type, it implies the same mechanism of enactment. Because the game type is played, it is as much a representation as the play type. Even though a verb may not denote the same contents in every occurrence, it always implies, if only in

17. "Second degré."

18. The verb "to game," formerly attested, is nowadays used only for gambling and playing videogames.

virtual fashion, the whole of the act's features, which supposes the existence, at a level as yet undefined, of a compatibility between them all.

The unity of the French "play" is in itself a deceptive appearance. This is the point of Huizinga's (seldom quoted, contrary to all other chapters) second chapter, "The play-concept as expressed in language" which he dedicates to "every language's [. . .] idea of and expression for play." This is what the philologist notices: "All peoples play, and play remarkably alike; but their languages differ widely in their conception of play, conceiving it neither as distinctly nor as broadly as modern European languages do" (Huizinga [1938] 1949: 28). There is no common Indo-European term to refer to play, and most languages have several words to do so. He thus concludes that, if the "function of play" seems "primary," "the abstraction of a general play-concept [. . . is] secondary" (ibid.: 29).[19] Moreover, there are no regularities between terms of the same language family, whereas there exist similar divisions between languages of different families (and Huizinga explores ancient Greek, Sanskrit, Chinese, Algonquin, Japanese . . .). On the one hand, it seems impossible to find regular correlations within the divisions; but on the other, a certain similarity always shines through the plurality of terms, since the facts and notions are so much alike.

Is that to say that, as diverse as the terminological divisions can be, the verbs' areas of application, connotations, and associated behaviors converge? Where French says "to dance," other languages say "to play." Our "play" does not encompass the same types of activities as "play" verbs in other languages. The history of the French play is not so simple.

Brief etymological history

According to the *Trésor de la langue française,*[20] the word *jeu* appears around 1100 AD, and means "amusement." As we know, it originates from Latin *jocus* meaning "banter, joking," and, according to Monique Clavel-Levêque (1984: 17), it appears as a "play in speech," as opposed to *ludus,* "play in act," used in ancient Rome. The English "joke" also stems from here. But only a century after its first occurrence, *jeu* already applies to battle. Contrary to one of Jacques Henriot's (1989) persisting ideas, that the uses of *jeu* diverged only recently,

19. By a very different route, Jacques Henriot comes to a similar idea: "The idea of play must have formed very slowly, progressively" (1989: 289).

20. Centre national de ressources textuelles et lexicales (www.cnrtl.fr).

most of its meanings have been present for centuries: "faire le jeu de quelqu'un" (1223), "lieu de jeu" (1385), "assemblage de cartes" (1451), "vieux jeu," "mouvement aisé d'un objet, d'un organe, d'un mécanisme" (1677),[21] and soon after the easy movement of muscles and natural phenomena (wind, wave). Does the spread of *jocus* in French but not in English (except for "joke") explain itself only by the fact that "*jocus* has supplanted *ludus*, while inheriting its meaning"?[22] Was it the consequence of the Circus Games ban, as if, to better suppress both the name and the object at the same time, the word had been replaced by a diminished synonym?[23] Can it be that straightforward that a term defining an unimportant act of speech can succeed terms applied to valued gestures such as gladiator fights?

The first edition of the French *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (1694) mentions, for the entries *jeu* and *jouer*, meanings that have apparently nothing to do with banter, such as fluency of movement of some artificial things, or ease of movement, or the idea of trickery found in expressions such as "jouer quelqu'un" (to play somebody). However, the derived form *joculator* ~ *joculor*,[24] "jongleur" (juggler)[25] designates, from the twelfth century on, all those whose work consisted in entertaining an audience, whether noble or popular: mostly musicians and singers, but also acrobats, mime artists, animal trainers, and inventors of all types of shows . . .[26] Whatever the reasons for the blossoming of *jocus* after

21. These expressions translate as (in order): playing into the hands of somebody; place for fun; card assembly; old-fashioned; smooth movement of an object, an organ, a mechanism.

22. According to the etymological origin provided by Centre national de ressources textuelles et lexicales.

23. Another word of the same family, *lusus* (*lusus* second entry in the Gaffiot Latin dictionary), means "game, distraction, banter, lovemaking, joke, wit."

24. The Latin verb *joculor* means "to joke."

25. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* states: "Jongleur, French Public entertainer: professional storyteller or public entertainer in medieval France, often indistinguishable from the trouvère. The role of the jongleur included that of musician, juggler, and acrobat, as well as reciter of such literary works as the fabliaux, chansons de geste, lays, and other metrical romances that were sometimes of his own composition. Jongleurs performed in marketplaces on public holidays, in abbeys, and in castles of nobles, who sometimes retained them in permanent employment. In such a case the jongleur became known as a ménestrel and devoted more of his time to literary creation than to entertainment."

26. *Jongleur* (juggler) is one of the synonyms of *La Grande Encyclopédie* to define "Schamans" in 1765.

the *ludus* root disappeared (this only subsists through derived forms such as "illusion," the attribute "ludique" only appearing around 1910), the *jocus* root soon encompasses the gestural meanings associated, including those with positive connotations. Notably, it includes the meanings of room for maneuver, leeway, and latitude (covered by a term meaning "play" in many other languages).[27] Therefore, this abstract of the French concept of "play" confirms Huizinga's observations about the striking recurrence of semantic associations from one language to another, regardless of their family. As if, taken together, the irregularity of the divisions and the converging uses finally revealed the joint existence of both a unique principle and multiple expressions.

BREAKING UP OR UNIFYING?

Diversity of "games" both in time and space obviously pleads in favor of a "fragmented perspective of games" (Duyckaerts 1987), of specialized studies, delimited to a well-defined object, whatever the discipline. Though we may think, as Duyckaerts does, that unifying impoverishes, we can also adopt his opponent Bartsch's (1987) viewpoint, which is that breaking up mutilates. And if precision calls for specialized studies, it seems that each of these always stumbles over difficulties that demand yet another specialized study.

Scarcity of generalizing theories

It is indicative that, in contemporary works, play is accepted as such only if it presents itself as entertainment; but also that, though it seems to have some social importance, that aspect is flushed from the notion to the benefit of other concepts such as sport, ritual, drama, strategy. . . . It is indicative also that the authors of the two main generalizing theoretical essays, Huizinga and Caillois, were not anthropologists,[28] and that their books raised no more than a few eyebrows within the field. It is indicative still that they were, in their time, those that most opposed a vision of playing as a frivolous or degenerate activity, a

27. The English "play" covers the notions of margin and latitude, as *Spielraum* does in German; and their equivalents are rendered by the term "play" in many other languages.

28. Huizinga was a philologist and historian, Caillois a writer, sociologist, and essayist.

waning ritual, or a childish amusement. It is indicative finally that they are still universally famous and abundantly quoted, be it in a critical tone, in order to justify specialized approaches while regretting the theoretical void in the field. And indeed, while some of these authors' answers to their own questions are rejected, others still are intensely discussed. Most critics agree with Huizinga and Caillois regarding the association of play with leisure as opposed to work,[29] on the fact that it is "free and gratuitous," and finally on the fact that it does not pertain to ordinary reality, while insisting on the need to take into better account the player's consciousness (or not) of playing. This nearly unanimous agreement illustrates the persisting richness of these "unsatisfying" generalizing theories. It also illustrates the persisting depreciation of play in the Western world. The contradictions that emerge are as evident in Huizinga's discomfort regarding the popular belief that opposes play to seriousness ("We are accustomed to think of play and seriousness as an absolute antithesis. It would seem, however, that this does not go to the heart of the matter," [1938] 1949: 18) as they are in Caillois' discomfort regarding the unproductivity of play. He insists that the contrast between this minor activity we deem insignificant and its crucial outcomes is bewildering enough for us to ask ourselves: Is this contrast serious? (Caillois [1958] 1961: 10).

These popular beliefs still pervade our perceptions of play (the next chapter is devoted to recounting their origin). But they are far from embodying the most important contributions of these two works to its understanding.

Defining, classifying: Of questionable use

To Huizinga and Caillois, the temptation to define and classify accompanies that of generalizing. It takes its root more in history for Huizinga, and in sociology for Caillois, though this vision is not explicit. Play is not truly the purpose of *Homo ludens*,[30] as Johan Huizinga points out in his foreword:

29. Widely acknowledged by authors basing their work on play in the West, this association stumbles upon the evidence of linguistic associations between work and ritual elsewhere in the world, as shown by several contributions collected in the *Essais sur le rituel* (Blondeau and Schipper 1990): according to the authors, the opposition should be between holy work and profane work.

30. The subtitle is "A study of the play-element in culture" in the English translation, "La fonction sociale du jeu" in the French one.

> […] it was not my object to define the place of play among all the other manifestations of culture, but rather to ascertain how far culture itself bears the character of play. The aim of the present full-length study is to try to integrate the concept of play into that of culture. (Huizinga [1938] 1949: 5)

To illustrate the idea that culture flourishes through play, he demonstrates that the act of playing applies in religion, law, war, poetry, wisdom, philosophy, science, and the arts. Play fulfills a "culture-creating function," and its most distinguishing feature is its dimension of contest that he calls "agonal," after Burckhardt (ibid.: 71). However far back in time he goes (public trials, mythological tales, poetry contests, chivalrous and rhetorical contests), and however far he widens his space (the entire world), he observes that the most important thing is "doing better than others" (ibid.: 63 and passim). His demonstration leads him to set out a chivalrous vision of play as a regulated competition that grants the victor prestige and honor: "We have gradually become convinced that civilization is rooted in noble play and that, if it is to unfold in full dignity and style, it cannot afford to neglect the play-element" (ibid.: 210). And he has some difficulties in defining, at the end of his book, what remains playful in the political and social life of his time.

> More and more the sad conclusion forces itself upon us that the play-element in culture has been on the wane ever since the 18th century, when it was in full flower. Civilization to-day is no longer played, and even where it still seems to play it is false play. [. . .] The observance of play-rules is nowhere more imperative than in the relations between countries and States. Once they are broken, society falls into barbarism and chaos. (Huizinga [1938] 1949: 206, 210)

In his 1957 article, Caillois classifies the existing analysis of play into four categories: historical, psychological, mathematical, and sociological. In his 1958 book—which he saw as a sociology of play, but which is a cultural psychology as well[31]—he classifies the principles on which the act of playing relies, and names them *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*. These names and the principles they define (competition, randomness, imitation, dizziness) are now famous.

31. For a critical analysis of Caillois' categories, see Wendling (2002: 43–44). According to him, these categories are useless, because "suitable everywhere," and thus represent a "theoretical diktat."

Even though I still share some of the anthropologists' criticism regarding Caillois' book, my study on Siberian games leads me to a more favorable view of his work, as I placed it in the context of its publication, while stripping it of some of the author's conclusions. This book—the only great classic to have directly taken play as its object—is primarily a response to Huizinga's (which remains esteemed), and is—like Huizinga's—a plea for the essence of play. But Caillois observes: "If games are cultural factors and images, it follows that to a certain degree a civilization and its content may be characterized by its games" (Caillois [1958] 1961: 83). He thus regrets that Huizinga neglected games themselves, and that he ignored the fictional role of play (the make-believe) and the existence of games of chance. And even though Caillois gives in to the temptation of classifying societies through their games, his book is in fact a "theory," thus containing a theoretical facet, and refrains from classifying.[32] The point of this theory is to show there are analogies and significant incompatibilities between the four principles above, which form couples, two by two.

Agôn forms a couple with *alea*, both of which are based on rules: they "are contrasting but complementary solutions to a unique problem—that all start out equal" (Caillois [1958] 1961: 110); "they are therefore contradictory but complementary. They are opposed in permanent conflict, but united in a basic alliance" (ibid.: 114). With time, the span of *agôn*, which is also that of merit and labor, widens throughout modern society, which seeks both to develop talents and to reduce inequalities. "*Alea* again seems a necessary compensation for *agôn*, and its natural complement. [. . .] Recourse to chance helps people tolerate competition that is unfair or too rugged" (ibid.: 115).[33] This is the reason the structural link between *agôn* and *alea* persists, and why this couple dominates throughout history (for a beautiful case in ancient Greece, see Dasen 2015).

32. Besides, a classification would be inapplicable because the "social function" of games changes, if not their nature (Huizinga [1938] 1949: 59). More broadly, Caillois repeatedly qualifies his claims; as soon as he announces his sociological project, he doubts it: "However, it is clear that such diagnoses are infinitely precarious" (ibid.: 84).

33. After having mistakenly described the *alea* as "passive" (ibid.: 17), Caillois acknowledges that, in the form of game, it is a deliberate and organized choice. The structural aspect of the link between *alea* and *agôn* is especially clear in sports; indeed, even though all sports try to diminish ever more *alea*'s part, without it, they would be devoid of meaning. *Alea*'s part comprises both the phenomenon of individual difference, and what is called "luck." It is the perfect excuse for the losing athlete, who will mutter: "I had some bad luck"; but if he wins, he will instead boast: "I have worked very hard."

The principles of the other couple are not inspired by rules, and promise no profit. Caillois belittles these two principles he calls *mimicry* and *ilinx* (we would have liked them to be named differently). Probably influenced by his discovery of the disequilibrium between the couple above and this one, he constantly compares them.[34] He argues that the latter couple loses its central place in celebrations and religious and political events in favor of the *agôn–alea* couple, when society is organized on a hierarchical mode. As he often does, he then qualifies his remarks:

> It would certainly be unreasonable to conclude, in the attempt to prove a definite hypothesis, that it was ever sufficient for a group to challenge the ascendance of the *mimicry–ilinx* combination and substitute for it a universe in which merit and chance, *agôn* and *alea*, would rule. As to this we can only speculate. But that this rupture accompanies the decisive revolution and is involved in correctly describing it, even where its effects are almost imperceptible, can hardly be denied. (Caillois [1958] 1961: 128)[35]

Caillois' use of the vague notion of celebration swamps with emotional and aesthetic considerations the reach that his numerous observations about the fundamentally figurative and representational nature of the *mimicry–ilinx* couple should have had in his book: it is also that of the very act of playing, before any type of game. This is how he explains that "any contamination by ordinary life runs the risk of corrupting and destroying its very nature" (ibid.: 56). As for Huizinga, he was wholly conscious of the importance of representation, even though he did not try to investigate it further. He wrote, for instance: "Now the tournament [. . .] can hardly be called a sport. It fulfilled one of the functions of the theatre" (Huizinga [1938] 1949: 195–96).

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34. "*Mimicry* intervenes," he argues, where the *agôn–alea* couple prevails, for "Chance, like merit, selects only a favored few. The majority remains frustrated." It enables the unlucky or the excluded to identify with the victor or the winner. From this is derived the worship of stars and heroes (ibid.: 120–24). "The point is finally reached where the champion and the star become interchangeable. The two tendencies are also compatible in this respect, for mimicry not only does no harm to *agôn* but reinforces it, since the competitors must not deceive the audience which acclaims and controls them" (ibid.: 74)

35. Probably because he emphasized the rupture, he set aside all the cases of coexistence of the two couples—and therefore the *potlatch*, which disappears from his book, as Thierry Wendling highlights (2002: 44 n. 1).

Other authors generalize without classifying, in a more concise fashion. Psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott does so, explicitly refusing to classify, since he looks for a universal process behind a great variety of realizations (1971). Philosopher Jacques Henriot (1989) does so too, as he dedicates a major part of his book to defining play. His chapter "Exegesis of a commonplace" investigates the definitions and constituent parts of play. His next chapter, "Elements for a definition," which continues through to the end of the book, is a long search for criteria that the author sees as necessary and sufficient, on the one hand, and specific, on the other. This long search is also very critical of Huizinga's and Caillois' criteria. However, detailed as they may be, and useful to grasp the essence of a phenomenon, can a cumulation of characteristics really lead to a steady definition?

According to Colas Duflo, a definition must be "genetic," which is to say, characteristics of the act of playing can be deduced from it (1997: 29–46). And indeed, Winnicott endeavors to write a genesis of "play." He studies the way in which a newborn learns to seize something as a "transitional object" in order to create a "potential space." His input is valuable when analyzing the cognitive dimension of play (see below, ch. 9). As for Henriot's approach, though it does not lead to a "genetic definition," it is pervaded with the intuition that the act of playing is of a metaphorical nature. What playing has in common with creating metaphors (and which is not unimportant to the former's genesis) will be the object of our last chapter.

Classifying is difficult, and not only because definition criteria are missing. Moreover, what is there to classify? Types of games (skill games, gambling . . .), as many folklorists, historians, and ethnographers do? Always useful, but inevitably incomplete, typologies are of little help when it comes to understanding the act of playing. Existing analyses, as Caillois made in his 1957 article? The main orientations of generalizing works examined from their respective anthropological perspective, as Wendling did? The latter calls the first orientation he highlights the "mystical approach," basing his analysis on Jean-Marie Lhôte's work, which he deems as indebted to Schiller's legacy owing to the proximity between play and the sacred. He sees here a "subjectivity pitfall." The second orientation that Wendling highlights is the "definitional temptation," which resorts to the same concepts (rules, leisure, freedom, reality, conscience . . .) over and over again, and is susceptible to the same criticism. The third, "play as a reflection," brings together various works noting in games hints of a certain stage of civilization, or of a relation between cultures (Wendling

2002: 33–44).[36] According to Wendling, the "proper use of rules"—with its arbitrary aspect (pinpointed by Caillois), and its appropriation by the players (noted by Huizinga)—must be the basis of an anthropological approach to chess. However, perfectly adapted as it is to this type of game, can this methodological choice be extended to other types?

But, more importantly, is classifying essential? Do not classifying principles always more or less depend on the objective sought, the latter always depending on the author's field, even if his or her aim is to give a global overview of play? I now endorse philosopher Colas Duflo's analysis of the different classifications of play (though I risk seeing his words apply to my earlier presentation of the approaches, discipline by discipline!):

> If all these classifications are equivalent, that does not mean they are interchangeable, nor that they all are insufficient, but in a more positive way, that they perfectly fulfill the use for which they are intended. Examining these classifications for themselves, it seems we had forgotten they existed regarding a goal, that goal being different for the psychologist, the sociologist, or the mathematician. If all are equally valid, it does not mean they are not valid at all, but that they all are exactly valid for what they intend to be valid. In a certain way, they all are suited to their different purposes. (Duflo 1997: 26)

Consequently, let us avoid the temptation of classification. However, are things easier with specialized studies? In his conclusion, Duflo acknowledges that the methodological restrictions he imposed on himself have "produced theoretical effects, some of which exceed the strict framework in which our analysis were in principle limited" (ibid. 253). Wendling acknowledges at the end of his book that the regulated aspects of chess he wanted to focus on contain ritual potentialities. It is as if every time we want, in order to be precise, to delimit an aspect of play by ruling out the others, its complexity reappears sooner rather than later, by way of perspectives we thought had been sidelined.

36. According to this third perspective, sports are the reflection of capitalist societies, and the Roman amphitheater that of a slaver mind-set. Wendling hence criticizes the fact that Caillois classed societies regarding which couple of his four principles dominates. For my part, I would not be so harsh with Caillois: the transformation of the Siberian Games in modern times does indeed match a certain change in society.

RETURN TO A UNITY OF PLAY

This is why, after an overview of the main recent works, I came back to the assumption of an underlying unity. This was already my first intuition faced with the totalizing aspect of the Games, my cornerstone examples shared with the Roman Circus Games. The fact that these had been targeted by attacks fostering the Western perception of playing only encouraged me to work on it. Dedicated to the history of these attacks, the next chapter will recount the manner in which, after persistently deconstructing this totalizing aspect, they ended up removing all value from playing. They confined it to the area of frivolity and uselessness. Another chapter will follow, which will aim at reconstructing a concept of play based on its lacks and paradoxes, thereby defining it in a negative way.

CHAPTER TWO

Play in the West
From condemnation to recycling

Jeu sans péché va rarement.
Qui joue n'est pas l'ami de Dieu,
Les joueurs sont tous fils de Satan.[1]

– Sébastien Brant, *Stultifera navis*

For the most part, the overview above linked the lack of interest in play to its continuing depreciation at the hands of religious and political powers in the West. This chapter investigates this long history in order to try to understand, through the enduring tide of condemnation (often the only reason some of these games are still known to us today), and of moments of tolerance and compromise, why these powers took it upon themselves to censure play.

CHRISTIAN CONDEMNATION

The church fathers detail their reasons thoroughly. But they were not the first to criticize: play was one of Aristotle's targets in the *Nicomachean ethics*.[2] In Rome,

1. "A game rarely goes without sin./Whoever plays is not the friend of God./Players are all sons of Satan."
2. The main aspects of Georges Minois' study (2000) of the Greek philosophers' positions in his history of laughter also apply to play.

the round dance, deemed unfit, had been pushed back beyond the closed gates of the Arval Brethren; and Cicero had famously little love for laughs, games, and coarse jesting.[3] For his part, it was Juvenal who coined the famous expression *panem et circenses* ("bread and circuses") in his Satires (X-81). The fathers reserve their most vindictive condemnations for the Circus Games, in which they see the expression of an entire *Weltanschaaung*. It is of interest that their reproaches are aimed especially at these public and official Games, and that they long remained ineffective. This leads eventually to a decree abolishing the Games—both the Roman Circus Games and the Greek Olympics[4]— issued by the Emperor Theodosius I in 393, and soon followed by the gradual shutting down of stadiums.[5] Under Theodosius' reign, the last of the united Western and Byzantine Empires, Christianity becomes the dominant religion: from then on, all official demonstrations honoring pagan gods are forbidden, their temples closed, and their statues removed or destroyed.

Before that, numerous church fathers, expressing themselves in Greek or Latin, condemn these Games and subsequent behaviors. The fathers despise all forms of games that occur within this frame: be they hand-to-hand fighting or simple distractions. They find in the Games an abstract (of great interest to us, though partial and biased) of more complex realities[6] they must fight in order to make way for the new ways of thinking and living they want to propagate. The fathers immediately condemn the Circus Games in their entirety as a show, and for what is shown in them, particularly fights and stage plays, and their audiences, too. At first, however, they do not disapprove of gambling and the drawing of lots. These are seen rather as cases of collateral damage, which will only slowly be incorporated into the arena of play seen through the angle of chance.

3. Weber (1978: 554); Le Brun (1997).

4. The commonly held view sees these Games mainly as sporting events. Yet the Roman Games, heir to the Etruscan Games but close to those described in the *Iliad*, were varied and changed constantly: some were drills to prepare for war, others saw poets and singers compete. We recall their bloody image, while the Greek Olympics evoke the idea of truce.

5. However, the first interdiction came from an edict in 325 AD, after Constantine's conversion, but was never carried out. Gladiatorial combat schools were closed down as late as 399. Games went on longer in the Byzantine Empire (Boucher 2001: 238 and n. 36).

6. In his work on the construction of Christian identity and its subsequent moral aspects, Paul Veyne (2005) separates gladiatorial combats from other games.

TERTULLIAN AND THE "PUBLIC GAMES" OR "SHOWS"

Tertullian's *De spectaculis*, published by the end of the second century AD, seems to be the church fathers' first moralizing attempt to discredit play.[7] It is emblematic of the church's global vision of the Games, and its attempts to raise awareness. This treatise is directed more toward the spectators than those who play. For the Games are not mere shows, and the living are not the only ones they please. The Games are celebrated in front of the gods, too, and must bring joy (*laetitia*) to them as much as to the living. Furthermore, their purpose is precisely to "rejoice" the gods (Clavel-Lévêque 1984: 9, 38–39, 84–85, 179). Hence, the statues of gods—in whom the Romans saw their first fellow citizens (Scheid 2005)—are laid or sat down to take part in the banquet, and those of the illustrious dead mingle with the audience. Tertullian, a Berber from Carthage, and a Christian convert since 193, thirsting for the absolute, writes a great number of treatises on women's ornaments, decency. . . . His *De spectaculis* condemns both the Circus Games and drama. His main point, presented in sections III to VI, can be summarized as follows: even though the Scriptures do not forbid Circus Games, the Roman Games, be they holy or funereal, are "some kind of sacrifice idolatry gives to Satan," simply because they honor pagan gods or the dead.

Giving the blood of the living to the dead

Actually, in the Roman world, the Games seem to stem from funeral rites: the *munus gladiatorum* is the "gladiator's gift" to the dead.[8] In the eye of Tertullian, this is the most horrendous aspect of the shows: for the Romans, they are a *duty* with regard to the dead. His successors carry on this position.

> The ancients considered that in this show they performed an office towards the dead. [. . .] For formerly, since it was believed that the souls of the dead were propitiated by human blood, they bought and sacrificed, during their funeral rites, captives or slaves of a bad description. Afterwards it was thought fit to disguise

7. Translations for *De spectaculis* vary: "The shows," "Of public games," "On the Games." Our purpose here is not to assess what Tertullian owes to other Latin authors, such as Cicero, who, in *On the nature of gods*, investigates the foundation of religious devotion (Auvray-Assayas 2004: XI), or such as Origen and other theologians, who transformed monasticism into a model of normal behavior (Le Goff [1984] 1988: 99).

8. *Munus,* duty, service, also means gift, exchange, see below, n. 11.

> this impiety under the cloak of pleasure. Those therefore whom they had prepared, trained up in such arms and in such manner as they were then able, provided only they learned how to be killed, on the appointed day of the funeral—sacrifices they consumed at the place of burial. Thus they consoled themselves for death by murders. Such is the "origin" of this service. But by degrees they advanced to that which was charming in proportion as it was cruel, for beasts could not be sufficiently pleased, unless it were by beasts too that the bodies of men were torn in pieces. What therefore was offered to appease the dead, was put forsooth to the account of funeral obsequies, which kind of thing is idolatry, since idolatry also is a kind of funeral obsequy: the one ministereth as much, as the other to the dead. But in the images of the dead, if we consider the "titles," daemons exist. (XII)[9]

Tertullian links the joy that the Games provide to the audience to a sacrificial aspect, because he understands that the blood of the living is food for the dead in the eyes of the pagan (Boucher 2001: 243).[10] Games thus seek to reinvigorate the dead (R. Bloch 1976: 68), and that is why what Romans value in gladiatorial combats is blood-flow. Tertullian spreads the idea that what is truly blameworthy is to take interest in those Games, and Augustine of Hippo also subsequently criticizes the spectator's gaze. According to historian Paul Veyne, the simple fact of watching a gladiator kill is blameworthy, given the ideal of sincerity the Christian mentality imposes: one must take into account what the soul sees and not only what the body does. He quotes Salvianus, who writes in the fifth century: "The shows' impurities are that actors and spectators become accomplices of the same crime" (Veyne 2005: 591).

Nowadays, historian Monique Clavel-Lévêque also summarizes the initial purpose of the Roman Games by referring to their sacrificial aspect: the *Ludi* gather those who have goods to trade.[11] This trade, she writes, affects communication with the gods and the dead, in order to renew vital energies: the Games bring fertility

9. The quotes are taken from the 1842 translation by Charles Dodgson, available online at http://www.tertullian.org/lfc/LFC10-13_de_spectaculis.htm. The Roman number following indicates the section to which they belong.

10. Jerome invokes the same reasons to condemn pagan rituals. Later, Athanasius of Alexandria writes that dead Christians do not demand blood since they will resurrect.

11. The author bases her trade-oriented interpretation on the name of the "gladiatorial combats," *munera*, plural for *munus*, "service, office, function, gift within one's office"; *communis* is the community of those who share *munia*, trading goods (Clavel-Lévêque 1984: 39, 74).

and prosperity, and also constitute *remedia* for the plagues (1984: 24). The Roman people invite the gods and the dead to attend Games, staging these "trades" to conjure up organically the idea of a contract concluded with the gods. In this way, the Games appear to be "scale models" aiming at "renewing, understanding, and dominating the world." Thus, the task of organizing Games becomes, parallel to the social and political organization's degree of sophistication, a major political tool for the different components of society struggling for power, be they circumstantial Games or periodic public Games. Multifunctional, able to endlessly adapt, the Games are, Clavel-Lévêque says, "universalizing cultural and religious solutions."[12]

Representation is deceitful

As soon as the insightful Tertullian establishes that all shows rely on idolatry, he applies himself to demonstrating the soundness of his disapproval. His first target is stage and drama, sharing with games the "same 'origin' and like 'titles'" (X). Some censors, he adds, ordered the destruction of some theaters, "consulting for the morals of the people as foreseeing a great peril accruing to them from licentiousness." Did Pompey not rush to transform a theater into a temple for Venus? "But there is fellowship between Venus and Bacchus: these two daemons of drunkenness and lust have conspired and leagued together. Therefore the theatre of Venus is also the house of Bacchus"; these theaters host "the dissoluteness and postures of the body," indecent pantomimes, music, and verses. But it is not only in the name of indecency or affiliation to play that theater is blameworthy.[13] It is mostly because of its function of representation:

> But again I ask, whether the very use of masks can be pleasing to God, Who, forbiddeth *the likeness of any thing*, how much more of *His own image*, to be made? The Author of Truth loveth not that which is false. (XXIII)

Though this judgment is due to the social morality he recommends ("how shall He judge the pantomime, who is also trained in all things pertaining to a

12. Clavel-Lévêque (1984: 18, 28, 84, 129, 134, 141, 181, etc.).

13. Tertullian does not say more in this treatise, decency being the topic of a separate treatise, *De pudicitia*. He recommends integrity of the body and forbids adultery. However, he does not link adultery to the Games. This interdiction comes second, just after idolatry, which he impersonates: "For I [idolatry] provide many an opportunity for adultery" (5th section of this treatise).

woman!," ibid.), Tertullian always keeps in mind the reason he deems fundamental in the end, which is that the Games *deceive* humans, and thus betray the Creator's intent. By the pleasure they bring upon them, the Games impede humans from seeing that the former's holy appearance in fact hides a diabolical reality:

> We see therefore that the "performances" also are dedicated to the honour of those who occupy the names of the inventors, and are not free from idolatry, seeing that even those who instituted them are on that account esteemed gods. Indeed as concerning the "performances," we ought to have taken our rule from an earlier source, and to have said that the daemons, from the beginning, providing for themselves, among other appurtenances of idolatry, the defilements also of the shows, whereby they might draw away man from God, and bind him to their own service, inspired him also with the genius for this sort of handiwork. (X)

Therefore, his will to show that the same reasoning applies to gymnastic wrestling, which has the same origin as other games, cannot surprise us. "Moreover the rites of their Castors, their Hercules's, and their Mercuries have brought gymnastic 'performances' also into practice" (XI).

> But if thou contendest that the race course is even named in the Scriptures, thou shalt have that indeed granted: but thou wilt not deny that the things are unfit for thee to behold, which are enacted in the race course, the blows, and the kicks, and the buffets, and all the wantonness of the hand, and all the battering of the face of man, that is, of the image of God. Thou wilt not approve in any case of vain runnings, and yet vainer shootings and leapings: strength used for an hurtful purpose, or for no purpose, will in no case please thee; nor again the training of an artificial body, as over-stepping the workmanship of God. [. . .] Moreover the art of wrestling is a work of the Devil. It was the Devil who hugged the first human beings to death. The very attitude is the power of the serpent, firm for taking hold, tortuous for binding fast, supple for gliding away [. . .]. (XVIII)

Therefore, not only are the Games deceitful, but they distort human beings such as God created them, and drive them to excess, which may lead to serious injustices.

> We will now look for a reproof of the amphitheater also from the Scriptures. [. . .] It is a good thing when the guilty are punished. [. . .] But who shall be

my warrant that the guilty are always sentenced to the beasts or whatever the punishment be? (XIX)

Pleasure of man, displeasure of God

> But mark thou, I pray thee, how the whole theatre was devilish. For first, it was made up of drunkenness and luxury, whence nothing healthful could come. Secondly, the spectators in it were depraved, and he that gave the banquet the worst transgressor of all. Thirdly, there was the irrational pleasure.
>
> – John Chrysostom[14]

The pleasures the Games provide are to be forbidden, along with any affective expression:

> But the shows are a kind of pleasure [and . . .] in like manner pleasures [. . .] embrace the special division of shows. [. . .] For where there is pleasure there is also partiality, through means of which, in fact, pleasure hath its relish. Where there is partiality, there is also rivalry, through which partiality hath its relish. Moreover also where there is rivalry, there is both madness, and wrath, and anger, and grief, and all the rest that cometh. [. . .] When therefore madness is forbidden to us, we are prohibited every show, even the Circus of these, which, like these, assort not with the rule of religion. [. . .] For what good can those, who are therein engaged, gain to themselves? [. . .] All that they desire, all that they abominate, is foreign to themselves: so that with them love is idle, and hatred unjust. [. . .] We know that *even foolish jesting* and *every vain word* is *judged*, by God. (XIV–XVII)

Though Tertullian possesses an irrefutable argument in the displeasure of God—"In how many more ways must we go on to argue, that not one of those things, which come under the head of shows, is pleasing to God, and that that which is not pleasing to God doth not befit the servant of God?" (XXIV)—he takes the time to counter the possible objections—"But now suppose that thou art to pass this life in delights"—only to go one step further:

14. Quoted by Horowitz and Menache in *L'Humour en chaire* (1994).

> What greater pleasure than a disgust for pleasure itself? [. . .] Wouldest thou both fightings and wrestlings? [. . .] Behold uncleanness thrown down by chastity. [. . .] Wouldest thou also somewhat of blood? Thou hast Christ's. (XXIX)

What is most significant, however, in Tertullian's global vision leading to his disapproval of the Games is his thought process. While stacking up his arguments, he sees that he cannot content himself with simply listing them. What he must do instead is consider their structure, their association. But how? At times he blames the frame (the temple of Venus, the amphitheater); other times the act: "It is not the places in themselves that defile, but the things which are done in the places, by which we have argued that the places are themselves defiled: they are defiled by the defiled" (VIII); and other times still the attitudes and emotions the act implies, that of "'ludus, that is from sport,' for instance, 'they ran about in game'" in the Lupercal Games (V), all these being pleasures in little harmony with submission to God.

But Tertullian also oversteps factual appearances at times. During chariot races, he writes, a horse may be used "without guilt," but "pressed into the games, from being a gift of God it passed over to the service of devils" (IX). Here, it is clear that it is not the act in itself that is guilty, but the intent behind the act. In short, whatever the point of view, there is something in these Games that changes every action taking place within them: any action performed within this frame differs from what it is in ordinary life. And this "something" provokes insoluble contradictions for the audience:

> [. . .] and he, who guardeth the ears of his virgin daughter from every lewd word, doth himself carry her to the theatre to such words and actions: and the very man, who in the streets restraineth or protesteth against one that carrieth on a quarrel by blows, doth in the race-course give his voice in favor of more serious battles: and he who shuddereth at the corpse of a man that hath died in common course, doth in the amphitheater bend down most enduring eyes upon bodies mangled and torn in pieces and begrimed with their own blood. (XXI)

> But if tragedies and comedies are the originators of crimes and lusts, bloody and lascivious, impious and extravagant, that which commemorateth a thing atrocious and vile, is itself in no wise better. That which is rejected in the doing, ought not to be listened to in the recital. (XVIII)

Altogether, the Games' frame overturns the meaning and values of things.

TEN CENTURIES OF "TAMING" THE BODY

This is how Tertullian lays the cornerstones for the global condemnation of (nearly) all that is play. As far as I know, no other doctor of the church dedicates a work as explicit and advanced to this theme as *De spectaculis*. Some revisit the generalizing aspect of its condemnation, specifying that only certain aspects of play and dance are forbidden. And indeed, is the Bible not full of examples of dancing? Gregory Nazianzen's (329–90) only reproach to Emperor Julian regarded his ill use of dancing.

> And if thou must needs dance, like a festival-keeper and reveler, then dance, but not the dance of Herodias the immodest, the end whereof was the death of the Baptist, but rather that of David upon the stopping of the Ark, which I take for an emblem of a rapid and diversified walking after the will of God.[15]

Members of the clergy go on to endorse Tertullian's arguments, as do subsequent councils and synods later, though gradually dropping the central accusation of idolatry. Political powers and public opinions take over from the church, with other wordings and other perspectives, as we will soon see by way of (mainly) French examples. These illustrate the secular persistence of disapproval of particular movements, and even of the intent to perform. They further illustrate the emergence of other reprehensible aspects of play, such as those aiming at changing fortune's direction, or winning money.

Numerous attacks, numerous targets

Tertullian's successors reprove pagan customs while appealing to fear in order to convey the Christian message. Some focus on bloodshed—blood of humans, of course, but also that of slaughtered animals; others on the deceitful aspect of pleasures provided by music, dances, wrestling, feasts, . . . that is, by all kinds of flattering things in which the devil hides, and that divert us "from the right path," as Basil of Caesarea says in his homily XXI "on disregard of the things of this world" (§ 90).

Considered separately, their arguments are, basically, always the same. Gallotti (1994) classifies them into two moral categories: display of dissolute

15. Gregory Nazianzen's second invective (115). https://archive.org/stream/julianemperorco00juligoog/julianemperorco00juligoog_djvu.txt.

behavior and theatrical entertainment, both of which impede on prayer time. Moreover, given that the objective of theater is the expression of passion, it is impossible to moralize (ibid.: 53–57). However, up until the modern era, it is bodily acts that remain the main object of disapproval.

Of good and bad uses of bodily parts

The fathers prey especially on specific movements and gestures. Basil of Caesarea (329–79) loses his temper in his homily XIV "against Drunkards." He rebukes people for moving their legs, jumping madly, and sparking wild dances, instead of bending their knees to worship the Lord; they should thump their chests instead of clapping their hands (§§ 173–74).

And likewise John Chrysostom (349–407). His opprobrium concerns the introduction of dancers and mime artists who improperly shake their arms and stamp their feet, thus dislocating their body by thousands of contortions. It would be better to go to a place that offers only tears ("Homily on the statues"). Thus, he singles out three misconducts in particular: dancing, jumping, and laughing. It is Golden Mouth himself who spreads the idea that "Jesus Christ never laughed," based on the fact that the Scriptures never mention any such laughing, though they refer to the tears he shed on various occasions.[16] Regarded at first as the worst way to break silence, laughter goes on to be considered as "the worst pollution of the mouth" (Le Goff [1989] 1997: 46).

Feet are not made for jumping

> In many parts of Europe
> dancing or leaping high in the air are approved
> homoeopathic modes of making the crops grow high.
>
> – James G. Frazer, *The golden bough* III: 83

16. Le Brun (1997); Le Goff (1997); Minois (2000: 103, 318). Georges Minois uses this sentence: "Jesus never laughed" as a subtitle for the chapter he writes on demonizing laughter in the Middle Ages. He mentions Peter Cantor's position (twelfth century): to him, Jesus can laugh as a man, not as God (Minois 2000: 107).

I want to comment first of all on jumping, or rather on jumped dances, which have been condemned by the Christian church time and again throughout the ages. Jumping has a special place in many religious traditions worldwide, and particularly a core place in the play notion that emerges from the Siberian data analyzed in the second part of this book. Some interpretations—controversial ones, but what matters here is their number—give jumping and jumped dances a place of honor in ancient Rome as in ancient China. One etymological tradition explains "consul," the name given to the two magistrates in charge of administering Rome, as he who leads the dance, and the council or *consilium* as those who jump together, those who gather.[17] And a sinological tradition links Confucius and his followers (or more precisely their predecessors in ritual art) to the mastery of a similar type of dance (Eno 1990). The councils of the Roman church repeatedly insist upon it later on. The 1551 council of the Orthodox church in Moscow forbids in its *Stoglav* ("one hundred chapters") parties where jugglers and tambourine players "jump hysterically."

Abbot Jean-Baptiste Thiers perceives this tradition as he relies on "the fathers' opinion" to discriminate those "games and distractions that can be allowed or must be forbidden to Christians," as the title of his treatise indicates. From John Chrysostom, he recalls: "God gave us feet not to dance, but to walk mildly." This echoes strongly the criticism of the pagan misuse of the body, palpable in the title the Vatican gives to a section of Tertullian's treatise, *The wrong use of created things*:

> For we did not get eyes to serve our evil desires, and the tongue for speaking evil, and ears to listen to evil speech, and the throat to commit gluttony, and the belly to be gluttony's ally, and the genitals for unchaste excesses, and hands for violent deeds, and the feet for idling around; or was the soul placed in the body to become a factory of snares, and fraud, and injustice?[18]

The distinction between correct and incorrect use of the parts of the body foreshadows what Pierre Legendre (1978) called "taming the body,"[19] something that profoundly marks the medieval history of the Western Christian world.

17. Bonaventure de Roquefort 1829, II: 338; and *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française.*
18. www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit_20000825_tertulliano-spettacoli_en.html.
19. "Dressage du corps."

Actions to "tame" the body continuously overlap with the condemnation of their misuses. These are always the same: particularly jumping and dancing. For about ten centuries, and mostly during the eleventh and twelfth, numerous councils and synods[20] forbid these same movements—punishments are severe—and censure the "jugglers of God," such as this acrobat-turned-monk in Clairvaux:

> In order to compensate his incapacity to pray, he would place himself in front of the statue of Mary in the church and would "jump, high and low, over and under, and would get back on his knees, toward the statue he then saluted." (Aurell 1998: 71)

With a view to replacing these behaviors in public ceremonies, the bishop Guillaume Durand fosters the development of processions in the thirteenth century, a liturgical genre in which people walk slowly and calmly, one foot in front of the other, as an orderly and tidy army.[21] These transform into civic walks during the Revolution,[22] then into marches and demonstrations (be they displays of power or protest, or simple collective events). All of them have similar festive aspects, with music, uniforms, banners, and disguises.

BODY AND SOUL, MAN AND ANIMAL

In addition to their impropriety, these movements are denounced as expressions of the body, this "abominable garment of the soul" (Le Goff [1989] 1997: 46). Dances are judged both obscene and savage because they are inspired by animal behaviors; and animals, which live on four legs, do not talk and do not possess souls. Denouncing the Christian West's suppression of bodily expressions

20. Toledo, 589 (where justice was asked to act against dances in church) ; Narbonne, 589 ; Mainz, 813 ; Paris, 1196 ; Cognac, 1260 (Horowitz and Menache 1994: 41–42); Rouen, 1245 ; Orléans 1314 ; Langres, 1404 ; Lyon, 1577 (Heers 1971, 1983; Legendre 1990; Le Goff 1990; Poly 1992; Minois 2000, etc.).

21. Guillaume Durand (1230–96), bishop of Mende, author of the first liturgical encyclopedia, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, shows how to build and use a worship space.

22. Marching is a core part of public ceremonies, which are the most ideological manifestations of the official revolutionary position (Benoît 1992: 125).

with its "leaden mask," Schipper asserts that those who dance their rituals are marginalized from humanity (Blondeau and Schipper 1990: ix). Mimicking animals is strictly forbidden, since man is made in the image and likeness of God. Representing gods with animal parts is equally out of the question, since such gods would be pagan. In order to strip away any ambiguity, the medieval Christian West demonizes animals and animalizes the Devil. The latter obtains a tail, horns, and hoofs (Muchembled 2000). Two crucial distinctions are thus confirmed: between man and animal, on the one hand, between body and soul, on the other.

Any means are good to insist on the body and the soul's separation, both in time[23] and in space. Christianity wants to rationalize ritual practices in its own way. It has the "passion of the explicit" (Legendre 1990: 22). And making dance explicit means revealing the "passion of being someone else" that it expresses, according to the title of Legendre's book (Legendre 1978). Prohibition of body games strikes dancing the harshest, because the role of dancing is to "represent" and "embody" imaginary entities; and the reverberations are thus felt by drama. Augustine of Hippo (354–430), at the beginning of the third book of the *Confessions*, also wondered about the psychological mechanisms of representation, while regretting that "Stage plays also captivated me, with their sights full of the images of my own miseries: fuel for my own fire":

> Now, why does a man like to be made sad by viewing doleful and tragic scenes, which he himself could not by any means endure? Yet, as a spectator, he wishes to experience from them a sense of grief, and in this very sense of grief his pleasure consists. [. . .] Now, if he should suffer them in his own person, it is the custom to call this "misery." But when he suffers with another, then it is called "compassion." But what kind of compassion is it that arises from viewing fictitious and unreal sufferings?[24]

23. Time management would not be so easy, however, under its rule, as the church's conflicting opinions before the Reformation or later show. In 1397, the *jeu de paume* is forbidden on all days but Sunday: the people must work, not play (Boucher 1992: 12). In 1527, the bishop of Meaux asks that the holy aspect of Sundays be respected against games and other public events (Péronnet 1986: 76). During the seventeenth century, playing during services (Boucher 1992: 21) and the *jeu de paume* are then forbidden (Belmas 1992: 34).

24. http://www.ourladyswarriors.org/saints/augcon3.htm.

DRAMA LIES

Herein lies everything, more so than in the repression of emotions: the characters the actors represent on stage are imaginary beings, and compassion for these beings is shallow and empty. Much later on, during the seventeenth century—apart from the Jansenists to whom entertainment is unbearable as a whole[25]—some of the opponents of drama denounce the paradoxical aspect of communication that is both misleading (because it is wholly simulation) and dangerously "truthful" (because actors experience passion, and spectators too, by extension) (Gallotti 1994: 60).

Already blameworthy as an imitation, representation is more so, inasmuch as it portrays imaginary beings as veracious: these are represented to the extent that their reality becomes believable. When a human being—by his bodily conduct—represents not a fictional character but a being endowed with an independent existence in another reality, we no longer say that he is either "representing" or "embodying," but that he is "possessed." Since possession, as Gilbert Rouget shows, has an "identificatory" function, it conflicts with the notion of transcendent beings: how can one claim to be possessed by God and identify with Him, "Would imitating Allah, Jehovah, or the Holy Ghost be conceivable?" ([1980] 1985: 28). In the Christian world, only the Devil may "possess," thus condemnation of "possession" ensues.[26] Representation, for the purpose of concretely depicting those spiritual beings to be worshiped, falls to exterior material objects, such as paintings and sculptures.

GAMES DISSOCIATED AND REDIRECTED

> [. . .] yet those ordinary practices of our feasts, as choosing a king, throwing dice, drinking healths, trolling it round, dancing the cushion, and the like, were not invented by the seven wise men but myself, and

25. Le Goff ([1984] 1988); Marchessault (2007: 29). We know that Pascal, for whom diversion distracts from what is most important: thinking ("All men's miseries derive from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone"), distrusts emotions and disapproves of passions born of drama.

26. As we shall see, where possession leads to worship, the vocabulary of play is used.

> that too for the common pleasure of mankind. [. . .] they conduce to human life, which, if it were unpleasant, did not deserve the name of life [. . .].
>
> – Desiderius Erasmus, *In praise of folly*

The very repetition of interdictions, from one century to the next, is the best proof of how ineffective they are. The church struggles to keep the clergy away from profane life and prompts it to set a good example.[27] Synods and councils repeat their prohibition to neither "wrestle nor dance," "jump nor dance,"[28] but know that their churches and cathedrals are the only vast and covered buildings, hence the only spaces able to host public events; and that these churches and cathedrals still themselves hold some pagan elements. "Even though Christians go to church, they remain pagan, because the habit of dancing, inherited from pagans, subsists," writes Saint Cæsarius, bishop of Arles (sixth century) (Legendre 1978: 135). Services often end with games and dances, relying on the Bible's authority: "Monks and laymen alike dance the saraband, they hop and gambol" (Heers 1983: 70), not to mention the monks' games, *joca monachorum*,

27. The Fourth Lateran Council, 1215, orders those interdictions: "All clerics shall carefully abstain from drunkenness. [. . .] We forbid hunting and fowling to all clerics; wherefore, let them not presume to keep dogs and birds for these purposes" (canon 15). "Clerics shall not hold secular offices or engage in secular and, above all, dishonest pursuits. They shall not attend the performances of mimics and buffoons, or theatrical representations. They shall not visit taverns except in case of necessity, namely, when on a journey. They are forbidden to play games of chance or be present at them. They must have a becoming crown and tonsure and apply themselves diligently to the study of the divine offices and other useful subjects. Their garments must be worn clasped at the top and neither too short nor too long. They are not to use red or green garments or curiously sewed together gloves, or beak-shaped shoes or gilded bridles, saddles, pectoral ornaments [for horses], spurs, or anything else indicative of superfluity" (canon 16).
http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.asp.

28. Formulations by the Councils of Orleans, 1314, and Langres, 1404 (Heers 1983: 92). The Council (synod) of Cahors (1318) prohibits church people from fulfilling themselves the offices of jugglers, goliards, and jesters, under penalty of being stripped of their ecclesiastical privileges (Lever 1983: 30–31). In Florence, in the early fifteenth century, Savonarola banishes all games, and burns card games (Heers 1983: 257). The game and dance ban around the fires of Saint John is pronounced eleven times between 1397 and 1601 (Minois 2000: 239).

pleasant stories usually written as questions and answers to the Bible (Le Goff 1990; Minois 2000: 124ff.).

A true "dance epidemic" spreads across all of Europe by the end of the Middle Ages, taking the form of dances of death: Saint-Vitus' dance, clerical carols, and *tripudium* (Bukofzer 1960: 833, 843). In addition to dancing marches, cathedrals host "chapter games" which soon give birth to feasts of fools. As late as the sixteenth century, in the city of Sens, the priests dance on Easter Eve after dinner: they dance the *chora*, a fast-paced dance, but without jumping (Heers 1983: 95). However strict, the interdiction of jumping cannot eradicate it.[29] All in all, however, dances and bodily expression disappear from churches during the sixteenth century (Minois 2000: 154).

Churches also host theater-like entertainment called "Games" during the Middle Ages (*Game of Saint George and the Dragon, Jeu de Robin et de Marion, Passion Play, Jeu de la Feuillée* . . .). These Games, which combine the holy and the profane in their themes, circumstances, and performance mode, and which are, moreover, often played by the clergy, seem to be compromises of an uncertain status but of great versatility. Similarly—since they always take place on the clergy's initiative, or with its approval—feasts of fools and other carnivals thrive on their momentary disorder: in fact they ensure a steady order.[30] Even laughter reappears. Coming from the body, laughter obviously remains dangerous; and the question, too, remains as to whether Christ, the role model to imitate, ever laughed during his earthly life. Saint Louis comes up with a solution: he refuses to laugh on Fridays (Le Goff [1989] 1997: 44). The idea emerges that a

29. The rest of the book suggests a hypothesis about the peculiar reach of jumps, a widespread ritual behavior. There were jumpers in solemn Games in Rome (Clavel-Lévêque 1984: 134). According to Castil-Blaze (1829: 111), "a sect of *jumpers* settled in 1806 in New England. Following the example of King David, they look upon dancing as the most pleasant cult to God." This same author, music critic for the *Revue de Paris*, also states that "the Jesuit father Ménestrier says he has seen in 1682, in several French cathedrals, canons jumping in rounds with altar boys mainly on Easter Day" (ibid.: 109).

30. Their reach is multiform and paradoxical, as is the fight between Carnival and Lady Lent, both bloody and entertaining at the same time (Heers 1983: 224). Some of these Games involve the whole of society by overturning hierarchies. Their variety forbids generalization. Participation is not compulsory—usually dropouts participate, whereas in tribal societies, participation is mandatory for everybody (Turner 1982a: 42–43)—however, it usually invites the sponsorship of different powers (local, corporate, or other); in the way Roman notables participated in the Circus Games they financed (Veyne [1976] 1992).

mocking laugh can be an instrument of power. Humor at the pulpit[31] also develops: under the guise of making the believers laugh, it mocks whoever ignores or crosses Christian values. As so often in its history, the church,

> confronted with a phenomenon which it considers dangerous and does not really know how to control, totally rejects it. Later, around the twelfth century, it reaches a stage of bringing the phenomenon under control, distinguishing good laughter from bad, admissible ways of laughter from inadmissible. (Le Goff [1989] 1997: 43–44)

Following a long alternation of condemnations and compromises (and at times even near approval) (Minois 2000: 528–29), the church, with regard to the Counter-Reformation, finally manages to enforce the interdictions on profane entertainment in religious buildings: the latter are now exclusively dedicated to the Christian cult. Just before this, Rabelais is the last author to celebrate laughter and old-fashioned play, true to a universal image of alternation between happiness and misfortune. To Bakhtin, his work is a turning point for modernity: not only does it posit play as pagan compared to Christian prayer, but also as frivolous and unproductive compared to work, and as juvenile compared to the seriousness asked of any responsible adult. Much later, the Anglican duty of inactivity on Sundays joins play and work together: both are similarly forbidden to the Inuit people on the Lord's Day during the course of the twentieth century (Petit 2009: 175, 435).

Separating "game" from "play" enables the church to assert Christianity as a state religion. On the one hand, agonistic games are transformed into military art, laying the groundwork for "sports" stripped of the negative connotations of play; on the other, nonagonistic games are associated with the frivolous, leisurely, and juvenile aspects of play. However, this dissociation is not effective at the time of the French Revolution. In charge of calendar reform, deputy Gilbert Romme considers instituting a "National Games." In 1792, he defends his proposal in front of the National Convention. Once Romme is beheaded, others guarantee a future for his project. On Frimaire 6, year II (November 26, 1793), Danton states: "Recalling the Olympics, I ask that the Convention dedicates the Champ de Mars to National Games." Pierre Daunou, in a preliminary report to the eponymous law on public instruction, insists: "renew, for it is time, these charitable

31. According to the title of Horowitz and Menache's book (1994): *L'humour en chaire*.

institutions, include exercises for all, music, dance, racing and wrestling." Dancing and music are not to be found in the Olympics nowadays, but they have been displaced instead into the Cultural Olympiads that accompany them.[32]

Art of war, art of love

Meanwhile, the church "stresses [within its own structure] the solemn at the expense of the festive" (Turner 1982b: 85). Simultaneously, the "taming of the body" continues, and is reinforced in specific profane structures. Some body games are publicly supported as training exercises: the risk of bloodshed does not matter if they develop dexterity and bravery; they are then exploited as part of the chivalrous ideal and incorporated into military art.[33] From then on, they can slowly be "domesticated" (following Mehl's expression, 1990), but with the rapid expansion of universities from the mid-seventeenth century on, education begins to compete with them in the training of young nobles (Boucher 1992: 11–12). Adapted and renewed, they are then born again in the form of sports, the latter originally being reserved for the elite. Meanwhile, the Renaissance reinvigorates Juvenal's (truncated) formula: *mens sana in corpore sano*. Rabelais had popularized this formula by making it Grandgousier's parodic motto in educating his son Gargantua. And in 1896, Pierre de Coubertin gives an emblematic version to the entire world in the Olympic Games Charter.

Dance also gains its autonomy and takes off, in precise forms and with precise ends.[34] Pierre Legendre sees in it not only the "passion of being another,"

32. I am grateful to Justin Dyer, Damien Simon, and Arnaud Salvat for reminding me about the Cultural Olympiads, which, from 1912 to 1948, included art competitions at the Summer Olympics. The works of art had to be inspired by sport and included five categories: literature and music, of course, but also architecture, painting, and sculpture. Pierre de Coubertin himself won the first gold medal for literature for his "Ode to Sport."

33. In 1369, Charles V forbids his subjects from playing the *jeu de paume*, marbles, and bowling, and commands them to practice archery and crossbow (Boucher 1992: 20–21). He grants prizes to the most skillful. Beforehand, Philippe de Valois had exempted from tax those townspeople who practiced archery. Moreover, he granted letters of remission to those who mortally wounded any rash people who had got too close to the targets (Lamotte 1992: 41). We will see another example of tolerance concerning violence against persons in a play frame in ch. 10.

34. The Parliament of Paris forbids all holy dances by a judgment of September 3, 1667 (Castil-Blaze 1829: 110).

but also a "theatrical proof of love," in line with the "adventure of sexual difference" announced by Thoinot Arbeau in 1588:

> Dances are practiced to know whether lovers are healthy and fit. (Quoted by Legendre 1978: 21)

As good a reason as any for dances not to be "religious acts" but rather "honest entertainment" only.[35] "Taming the body" especially implies the elimination of all repetitiveness from dance, in order to establish, through ballet, the supremacy of linear narratives and historical time. Dance Masters, whose goal is to teach the body good manners, reach their apex in seventeenth-century France (Legendre 1978: 9, 93, and passim). But nothing can stop other dances from thriving, on the outskirts of villages, under the veil of darkness. . . . The clergy calls them obscene and savage at first, before turning a blind eye thereafter.

As for medieval jugglers, they entertain all audiences, but scare them too, because of their nonconformist way of life, by their unseemly acts and manners, by their animal disguises. Paradoxically, they are redeemed by their closeness with mendicant orders when the latter come to be created. Missionary monks also live off alms received on public squares, where they preach and mime Christ's life.[36] But toward the end of the Middle Ages, jugglers are discredited, as opposed to minstrels, who are kept by lords. Bukofzer thinks this inferiority is due to their status as music performers, that is to say, they are only "players" and not "finders," the latter being the only ones to "benefit from the prestige linked with creation" (1960: 846–47).

And so the ancient Games finish decomposing. As Georges Minois (2000: 583) concisely says, while ancient laughter sanctified the world, diabolical laughter now deconsecrates it. Made autonomous and deconsecrated, military arts, "narrative" dances, and, soon after, "sports" no longer have anything to do with liturgical and public life, nor even with each other. Nothing to do with drama and stage play. But from the mid-seventeenth century on, honest folk

35. Seen as mere entertainment, dances soon lose their ability to provoke "effects" in reality.

36. Francis of Assisi sings like a troubadour. To Roger Bacon, a preacher must convince through the appropriate movement of his limbs. To Thomas Aquinas, the profession of juggler is legitimate because it agrees with rest, which allows for the recuperation of strength for the purpose of work (Aurell 1998: 70–71]).

may enjoy the theater, because now its goal is to distract, not to shape good morals (Gallotti 1994: 66).

Pleasure, boredom, rest

That is precisely when "boredom" takes on its modern meaning of "weariness of the soul" and "lack of taste," and when a new consciousness of emotions, and more broadly of psyche, develops. Pascal admits that Christians need to rest because none can think endlessly. They can play, have fun, joke about, and therefore soothe their minds in order to resume their activity in better conditions. There is a good use of games: transforming them into vital relaxation, thus avoiding their excesses. Enjoying oneself is seen as the only means of "becoming happy," since becoming "immortal" seems impossible.

> We have to pretend, man taking refuge in the fiction that identifies every means of not thinking about oneself to a means of being happy "in the meantime." [. . .] Entertainment works as if we could "always be" in the world, it builds a false duration, an imaginary unending time, but a far too human time which is only the summing up of moments during which men are busy chasing smokescreens. (Pécharman 2001: 18–19)

However, André-François Boureau-Deslandes, finding Pascal's support of entertainment a bit lackluster, pleads for Augustus' Rome in *The art of not being bored*:

> The highest point of a nation's pride truly is that where it loves more so and games and shows. (1715: 41)

Which is precisely what centuries of efforts had tried to get rid of.

WHAT IS AT STAKE IN PLAY: GUESSING, WINNING

As time goes by and sees political powers strive to crush the formal foundations of the Games, something else allows play to carry on and flourish: the latent existence of stakes, a notion that the condemnations presented up to now had set aside.

Because it cannot be in vain that we *succeed* in a game of skill, or that we *vanquish* in a dual game. The notion of stake rouses two overlapping areas of human desire in particular: the desire to shape the future, and the desire to be rich. These desires are the focus of debates in ancient times, well before Christianity. In Rome, the law forbids *alea*, "dice games," and *sors*, "pebble or any kind of object placed in an urn to be drawn": what we nowadays call gambling[37] (Guillaume [1981] 1983: 65–67). Only fortune-telling is at times considered lawful, and in 341 Constantius II even disallows the augurs' practices. As for the gifts received by the spectators during the Circus Games, these are not linked with the act of playing, because they come from distributions on the emperor's behalf,[38] or from the largess of the wealthy organizers.[39] The prizes are drawn or simply handed out, everyone receiving a chip granting them, for instance, a share of wheat. The beneficiaries never take an active part in the distribution. They do not even have to "bet" (Neurrisse 2003: 681).

Ideally, all the interest has to lie within the Games themselves, as in the time of the Greek Olympics, that is, in the most ancient period, because later the importance of winners' prizes and bets increases rapidly, perhaps too rapidly (R. Bloch 1976: 71). In sixth-century Constantinople, the *Corpus Juris Civilis* regulates and limits the money that can be spent on such events (Becq de Fouquières 1869: 103–5ff.).

DIVINATION LIES

For the church fathers, the true question, more than the question of money, is: Who stops the dice? Who draws from among the pebbles? Faced with gambling and games of chance, they invoke the same reasons as those used against

37. The French *hasard* (randomness/chance) comes from Arab *al-zahr*, "dice, dice game." "Randomness," Guillaume says ([1981] 1983: 65), "is a relatively modern notion. Symbolic devices such as dice, rather than games as an organized fulfillment of randomness, have participated in the late creation of the notion of randomness and in its mathematical precision."

38. Augustus mixes interesting prizes with worthless prices, Nero awards prizes such as ships, freedom, or homes (Neurrisse 2003: 681).

39. For their part, Paul Veyne writes ([1976] 1992), making public donations demonstrated civic devotion. In this hierarchical society, Games indeed represented a major power and prestige issue for those who organized them.

games in general: these offend God because of their link to the Devil, and their deceitful aspect.[40] In *De aleatoribus* (a text usually considered to have been written by Cyprian), the author commands everybody not to play dice games, for they are a deadly offense against God; in these games, there is no place for truth, and lying triumphs:

> [. . .] the hand of the dice player [. . .] wrecks and condemns itself. [. . .] It is the dice board which is the spear of the devil, and causes an incurable wound.

And Basil proclaims that the Devil, who always oversees these kinds of games, animates the players' dice with fury and folly (quoted by Guillaume [1981] 1983: 68).

Augustine dedicates a whole treatise, *De divinatione daemonum*, to the argument that claiming to tell fortune means believing in demons. Christians must not compel God to answer their questions—that would mean wanting to be equal to Him—nor try to understand his "unfathomable ways": human destinies depend on Him alone, and His will must be respected.

Little by little, focus shifts toward the notion of chance, but the latter is not yet defined by the absence of causality, and thus does not really avoid the almighty and inevitable causality that is the will of God. Furthermore, on the one hand, interdiction spreads to all games of chance, because they call upon Providence for a goal unworthy of God, and this under penalty of excommunication. For instance, this is what Charlemagne willed in the 803 Capitulary of Mainz (Neurrisse 2003: 681). On the other hand, hostility actually diminishes with time, and cards and dice are used almost innocently to tell the future. *The life of Gargantua and Pantagruel* reads as a series of divination games by Panurge concerning his betrothed (e.g., Bakhtin [1968] 1984: 231). As in all other cases, the resort to some form of divination persists—how could we eradicate the need to look to the future?—yet seers continue to be condemned, owing to what is perceived as the fundamentally deceitful nature of their practice.[41]

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40. These games are forbidden so as to "not tire God" (Guillaume [1981] 1983: 66).

41. It is on this basis that they are prohibited in Paris in 1973. In Russia, Peter the Great imprisons a prophet until "the time announced by his prediction has come," and then "punishes him like a fool who has recklessly said what he did not know" (quoted by Beffa and Delaby 1993–94: 316 n. 21).

Chance, time, and money

The link to money is also seen as sinful, being a source of idleness.

> The game of dice is to be prohibited, and the pursuit of gain, especially by dicing, which many keenly follow. Such things the prodigality of luxury invents for the idle. For the cause is idleness, and a love for frivolities apart from the truth. (Clement of Alexandria)[42]

During the fourth century, Ambrose also proclaims his hatred for gambling and games of chance, but for another reason: they incite the player's propensity to borrow money and risk excommunication if he cannot reimburse, and they encourage the moneylender to usury, that is, to "sell time that belongs to God alone" (Bériou 1998: 278). Furthermore, the endless variety of ways to cheat at these games, as well as during the bets on their results, provokes conflicts that are damaging to peace within society: as such, for a long time they are seen as a social plague.

During the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas concedes that the result of fate can be expected either of a spiritual influence or of chance (Guillaume [1981] 1983: 68). But if games of chance, an invention of the Devil, are reprehensible as such, they possess a principle of distributive justice allowing people to call upon them at times. In this way, the foundations of what Guillaume calls a "secularization" of gambling are laid. Thus, profit and greed, as long as they remain moderate, are no longer considered a crime (ibid.: 69). Moreover, though preachers still despise usury and avarice (and those guilty of them), "they sometimes boast—as contrast—the image of the good rich men," because "theologians undeniably paid attention to economical ethics during the entire thirteenth century" (Bériou, 1998: 275–77). Contrary to usurers, "merchants use wisely the time of the fairs" (ibid.: 284). Around the same period, Saint Louis' hatred for gambling never yields. In 1254, upon returning from the Holy Land, he promulgates an order that reorganizes his realm and forbids gambling, and even chess (Pastoureau 1990: 22). However, things are changing, for the King of France's strictness isolates him from his peers, given that, since chess become honorable, some of them have turned into passionate chess players. Playing chess is even accounted for by the statutes of various pious associations, on condition that it

42. *The Instructor*, III, xi. http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-instructor-book3.html.

is played neither with dice nor for money. Chess is to be allowed once more, as soon as the moves of the pieces are no longer decided by dice. From then on, thinking replaces randomness (ibid.: 21). And that is how chess becomes honorable: rationality triumphs.

Afterwards, justifications for games of chance increase and vary, as do ways of earning money through gambling: betting on game results spreads from the seventeenth century on (Boucher 1992: 19). But its incorporation into social life is lengthy and uneasy, for the economical, fiscal, moral, and civil stakes are high. So high that documents must be published to inform the population which games are "allowed and prohibited" (Thiers 1686) or "innocent and prohibited" (Bocquillot [1715] 1745), or whether they are public or private, whether they aim at distracting or earning money, or, finally, whether or not the players are members of the gentry:

> Ruining oneself gambling to court the king. [. . .] The ability to lose without moderation—likewise reckless spending—is one of the traits of [. . .] nobility. (Guillaume [1981] 1983: 72)[43]

Redistribution and lottery

In parallel, attempts to institute some redistribution appear. In 1539, Francis I launches a lottery called Blancque, inspired by Italian practices. Though regulation is strict, this attempt fails, as do subsequent ventures. France has to wait until 1661 and the royal lottery, established by order of the parliament to celebrate Louis XIV's wedding, to witness an expansion of the phenomenon. Lotteries flourish during the eighteenth century, and their profits go to public authorities or to the construction of public buildings (Neurrisse 2003). Charitable organizations also benefit from the lotteries, with a clear conscience: "*sors innocens*," because it is God who chooses the winners.[44] They show little interest in the immoral, irrational, and unjust aspects of the lottery that provoke sudden and unearned increases or decreases in wealth.

But there are some setbacks to the integration process. Whereas the Ancien Régime had encouraged gambling at court, nascent capitalism sees in it not only

43. According to Boucher (1992: 19), sovereigns paid the losses of those who had participated in games of *jeu de paume*.

44. Ménestrier 1700, *Dissertation des loteries* (quoted by Guillaume, ibid.: 70).

a social plague, but also a harmful flaw for the wealthy themselves, given that gambling hinders saving money. A new way of relating to money emerges, and provokes a double reaction. Though games must still be condemned in moral terms, their existence must be recognized; but with more efficient means of control (Guillaume [1981] 1983: 69). All in all, ambiguous as they may be, games of chance have a purpose of flexibility that is potentially useful to blooming trade.

> Games reintroduce the rule of chance among the rigid mechanisms of exchange: obtaining riches is balanced by the counter-code of the free and arbitrary. They thus tend to dissolve money in its function. Because money [. . .] becomes a sign for the player only when it incorporates the circuits of play; calling upon its indefinite repetition. Thus, not only do games overshadow the hierarchical link between earth, production and money, they also appear as the antinomy of trade's axiology [. . .] because although, same as the latter, they produce money, they do it outside of any *serious* reference to a system of market counter-values [. . .] moreover, diverting money from its function of nonrepresentation, they strip it a priori from its power to show the differential criterion of each social class. (Gossiaux 1979: 78)

Secular powers, having previously condemned games in a manner similar to the church, now integrate some of its aspects and channel them into different frameworks and institutional forms. During the eighteenth century, moralizing speeches (such as that of Jean Dusaulx, who in 1792 publishes his *Report on the suppression of games of chance, gambling dens, and lotteries*) coexist alongside the creation in 1797 of gambling houses. These are open to all at first, and then closed, victims of their own success, at the beginning of the nineteenth century; or else confined to reserved areas and doomed to semi-illegality, thus ensuring some sort of control (Guillaume [1981] 1983: 74–75). According to Guillaume, gambling bans almost entirely disappear, but they remain interiorized, and as such are a modern and efficient form of social control: popular opinion is convinced of the risks of bankruptcy, fraud, and degradation.[45] Investigating the continuous condemnation of gambling games, first for religious, moral, and civil reasons, and finally by self-censorship, even though the overall results are not truly negative (amongst other things, an honor code for paying debts is

45. In 1974, France, the age of majority is lowered to eighteen, but the minimum age to enter the casino stays twenty-one (Guillaume [1981] 1983: 76).

established), the author judges that we should not place ourselves on the level of speech, but on that of our desire faced with our own future (ibid.: 76–77). Thus chance becomes a major metaphysical question.

HAVE GAMES KILLED PLAY?

Repeated criticism does its damage. Bloody and obscene games disappear, numerous rational and secularized events replace them—parties, sports, and shows—and public authorities control gambling while churches remain dedicated to worship. From then on, and up to today, the association of play with leisure and pleasure dominates, as does its opposition to seriousness and utility, despite the growing acknowledgment of the role of play in learning, as in performance, in simulation, and in speculation. With distance, can we identify those factors, beyond the reprimands per se, that triggered the slow depreciation of the notion of play and the multiplication of specialized games? Specifically, is there not a relation between the two? Or rather a relation between the dissociation of the various kinds of games regrouped in the public Game structure, and the loss of their "sacredness"? Is it because they are not played all at once and all together that their property of being surrounded by all kinds of prescriptions has disappeared, as has their property of having a potential "effect" on reality in the manner of rituals, a property which explained their importance in the eyes of the participants and in the eyes of those who competed to organize them? Did they not need to have had an impressive ideological power to be criticized so often and with such strength, and did they not have a profound utility to survive that long?

Specialization, which is a feature—and perhaps, more importantly, a condition of the advent—of modernity, happens, as we know, to the detriment of all that has—like the Roman Games—a totalizing nature in society. But it does not forcefully exclude all types of sacralization. And this is revealing: all specialized games find a sacred aspect as long as they are performed in a specific time and space, in a festive atmosphere with spectators, and alongside other forms belonging to the sphere of play: music, costumes, prizegiving. So much so that sporting events today assume the role of historical religions, as Danièle Hervieu-Léger says in *The religion for memory* (1993: 17). This interpretation will be echoed by the Siberian data presented in the second part of this book.

CHAPTER THREE

Play defined in negative terms
A discrepant modality of action

The opposite of play is not what is serious
but what is real.

– Sigmund Freud [1]

Playing is no "doing" in the ordinary sense.

– Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens*

What is characteristic of "play" is that this is a name for contexts in which the constituent acts have a different sort of relevance and organization from that which they would have had in non-play.

– Gregory Bateson, *Mind and nature*

1. Freud continues: "In spite of all the emotion with which he cathects his world of play, the child distinguishes it quite well from reality; and he likes to link his imagined objects and situations to the tangible and visible things of the real world. This linking is all that differentiates the child's 'play' from 'phantasying'" ("Creative writers and day-dreaming," [1907] 1959: 144).

The previous chapters did not allow for a direct approach to play. Rather, they advised that it be approached from what it is not. We will thus base our reflection on the observations expressed in the epigraphs above: the sphere of playing *is not* that of "the ordinary sense." Whatever their origins, and whatever their formulations, all the authors more or less agree on this point, but they all agree too that this does not stop the game from being "*genuinely* lived" by the player.[2] Bateson adds his own fruitful observations to this analysis. While it has long been acknowledged that the notion of play applied first and foremost to a context—Tertullian despised play as a frame as much as for its content—the new fact is that this context or frame rests upon the specific way in which the acts carried out within are accomplished. More importantly, what is new is that this carrying out is defined *negatively*, as opposed to what it would be outside of its context. As famous as it is, it is worth remembering the anecdote that triggered Bateson's point of view:

> What I encountered at the zoo was a phenomenon well known to everybody: I saw two young monkeys *playing,* i.e., engaged in an interactive sequence of which the unit actions or signals were similar to but not the same as those of combat. It was evident, even to the human observer, that the sequence as a whole was not combat, and evident to the human observer that to the participant monkeys this was "not combat." Now, this phenomenon, play, could only occur if the participant organisms were capable of some degree of meta-communication, i.e., of exchanging signals which would carry the message "this is play." (Bateson [1972] 1987: 185)

And Bateson insists:

> It may even be that the essence of play lies in a partial denial of the meanings that the actions would have had in other situations. (Bateson 1979: 125)

Therefore, games stem from a "negative flaw," according to Albert Piette's (1997: 144) wise summary of Bateson's position. This negative flaw is the source of its internal dynamic. Building on Bateson's inspiring example of the monkey, Albert Piette adds that it is "latitude" that shows that a "playful nip" is not a bite, without being a nonbite either—but there truly exists something that looks like a bite.

2. According to Benveniste, play is a regulated activity. It comprises its own purpose, and does not aim at any useful change of reality (1947: 161).

As his commentary progresses, the "flaw" becomes "latitude," and relies on something tangible, the *movement*, and the fact that it *looks like* a bite. This concrete movement thus counts for something, albeit negatively, in the creation of a context or a frame, and what it evokes reflects reality. Because it establishes a link between an act and something else, and because this link is specifically the frame in which the act takes on another reach, Bateson's definition is *generative*. It draws attention to the fact that "play" is a *process* that constructs itself. Thereby, this definition finds itself ahead of the other definitions—those of a game defined by its rules as well as those of play defined as a structure of interaction—because it bases itself on the construction of a determination link between the level of action and that of the frame. And in so doing, it also makes the approach to play as a modality of action fathomable.

However, Bateson's definition also implies that there is a threshold between play and nonplay: this point is difficult to determine.[3] Is it enough to say that meaning is provided by the circumstances, and not immanent to play (Csikzentmihalyi [1975] 2000)? The structure of a situation is not enough for there to be play or not, Henriot (1989: 112) had already answered. There is play only if the players allow for there to be play, the latter in turn allowing initiative (ibid.: 217). And this is what the author's numerous examples demonstrate in order to justify the importance he gives to the subjective attitude. Duflo (1997) adds his own comments to these same examples: running is not a game if I want to catch the train, but it is one if I run for the simple sake of running; and I can take the escalator or the moving walkway the wrong way by mistake or as a game.[4] But is the intent of playing enough for there to be a game?

Other authors add that a game that is not conscious is not a game (Pariset and Albertini 1980: 24). But there are problems in making consciousness a criterion of the definition of play, as Henriot does (1983: 147):[5] "playing is knowing that we play"; are animals and babies "conscious" that they are playing, as Henriot himself highlights (1989: 256)?

Questions of the player's subjectivity, of his intention of playing, and of the awareness he has of the act will permeate the following chapters, as much as

3. For different reasons, Duyckaerts (1987: 16) wonders if the "frame" belongs to play.
4. According to Duflo (ibid.: 48–49), this type of conduct is governed by arbitrary rules determined by an equally arbitrary theme.
5. The author also asserts that, if we do not experience we are playing, there is no play (Henriot 1989: 203).

that of the distinction between play and reality, implicitly posed by the expression "non-play frame."

BUT WHAT IS A "NON-PLAY FRAME"?

In fact, the question of the link of play with something else emerges from behind Bateson's "negative flaw." Taking his definition literally, in principle, play can indeed refer to nothing. However, Piette rightly points out, play only *partially* negates the meaning that the acts that constitute it as a modality of action would have in other situations, and there exists, within the frame of play, *something that looks like* what would, in a "non-play frame" (i.e., in "reality"), be a bite, but is not. Hence, a "play frame" is implicitly a fiction with the appearance of a reality. It can thus be said to be *fictional*, in the same sense as explained by the works of Jean-Marie Schaeffer.

A fictional frame reflecting an empirical reality

The little girl bathing her doll indeed intends to "bathe" and "wash" it; and this bath, which I would call fictional, and is purposely created by her imagination and perceived as having a value of reality in the field of imagination, resembles the one that her mother gives her, but only resembles it, and the little girl knows this. In fact, every game, no matter how informal or rudimentary, always reflects some form of reality. This blurry reflection is what Winnicott evokes with the formula he uses as the title for his book *Playing and reality.* A mother who breastfeeds must debunk the baby's illusion that her breast is part of him: it is a "transitional object," and suckling is his "first game." She thus allows her baby to access an "intermediate area of experience" where his relation with the world is inaugurated, where a link between his "inner psychic reality" and "external or shared realities" is maintained. An adult usually removes himself from these transitional objects, but for numerous individuals, "external realities" remain a "subjective phenomenon." This leads the author to conclude that game refers neither to an "inner psychic reality" nor to "external realities" (Winnicott 1971).

Generally speaking, we can agree with Duflo that play produces another reality within our reality, and that, ultimately, the question of reality is a wrong question, or a wrongly asked question (1997: 218–19). Köpping (1997) has a similar opinion when he points out that what defines the "ludic" (playful) is

not the framing, but the possible transgression of frames: there is a paradox, he says, regarding the presence of a reference to reality in imagination and the incursion of imagination in reality (ibid.: 20). Theater and drama often arouse similar interferences—popular entertainments represent a challenge to reality by the surreal as virtuality, Kirby (1977) remarks—and virtual games even more so. In the same vein, Tom Boellstorff (2008) shows that Second Life has its own "cultural logic," its own in world dynamics which cannot be dismissed as a pale reflection of "real life." Through the avatar the player builds in the virtual world, he is able to "touch," the author says in conclusion to his study on the typical reactions of handicapped "residents" who create avatars for themselves within this world that are free from their handicaps. What he does in his virtual life produces some meaning for him in his real life, even if he never confuses the two. The virtual is what could happen—it thus has the form of reality—yet does not happen. And Boellstorff[6] opposes *virtual* not to *real* but to *actual*, adopting, after Leibniz and many others, the classic medieval Scholastic understanding of the term "virtual" when it first appeared (see below pp. 270–73).

As we examine these different formulations, something becomes evident: the fictional frame embodied by play (or ritual) establishes a form of reality both *separate* from empirical reality and *in relation with* it, and this sudden clarity falls foul of the limits of language. Hence, I shall adopt the usual formulation, imperfect but convenient as it is, and understood in homogeneous fashion: "relation of play to empirical reality," in order to ponder this question during the analysis of the Siberian data. The implicit outcomes of Bateson's position allow me to posit this formulation. The constituting acts of play are liable to refer to an empirical reality; and not just because the frame of play negates only *partially* the meaning they would have in the nonplaying "frame."

Another way of doing: Doing something else, elsewhere, otherwise

Accordingly, how is one to answer Huizinga's "playing is no 'doing' in the ordinary sense," if not that it remains *doing*, simply because it refers to a *doing*? Playing is not the antonym of doing and does not rule it out; it forms *another*

6. I thank Grégory Delaplace for showing me this book. Here is an excerpt: "It is not only that virtual worlds borrow assumptions from real life; virtual worlds show us how, under our very noses, our 'real' lives have been 'virtual' all along. It is in being virtual that we are human: since it is human 'nature' to experience life through the prism of culture, human being has always been virtual being" (Boellstorff 2008: 5).

"doing." However, nothing tells us beforehand that, if we do, we do not play: it is not enough to position ourselves from the point of view of *doing* to stop this *doing* from being a *playing* as well. On the contrary, our data clearly indicates that playing is considered, in Siberia, just as likely to curve empirical realities: it is expected that the act carried out in a fictional framework created by the player will produce an "effect" on such or such aspect of one's life in the actual world. The Siberian data also leads us to see in playing, considered as a modality of action, a process giving structure to certain types of activity (hunting, for instance) and engagement with the world. Taken as a whole, it will be an invitation to complete Huizinga's concise sentence: "playing is no 'doing' in the ordinary sense"; it is rather *doing something else, elsewhere, and otherwise*.

However, if play comes from the fact that it constitutes a peculiar frame, its practice can break this frame and lean instead toward the corresponding "doing": a joust can become slander, and wrestling combat. So how can we determine the threshold that separates the former from the latter? This is a question that will, later, call on the notion of cunning: cunning leads to victory in this frame, but brushes past what we consider as cheating, because it pulls us away from that frame.

In fact, the boundary between what is done in the name of play, on the one hand, and ordinary action, on the other, cannot be defined either from the perspective of the nature of what we do, or from that of the frame in which we do it, nor finally from that of the consciousness of what we do. In order to be perceived as play or as rite, actions refer to a level of metacommunication. The level that, according to Köpping (1997: 6–8), Huizinga has neglected: we all know, he says, that sacrificing an animal is different from slaughtering it for meat, and that we must change our outfit to go to mass; if we are conscious that the change of frame imposes a change of attitude, it means that there is some communication at another level. There is something that indicates: "This is play," or "This is ritual."

A BUNDLE OF INTERDEPENDENT DIMENSIONS

We can't answer in the abstract the question of the complex relationship between play (or rite) and "reality," the latter embodying one of the main questions that outline my path through the Siberian data. This path is an exploration of the many dimensions through which "play" arises in reality. One of them draws

attention to its fictional aspect, another insists upon its manner of heralding, in an alternate reality, a "doing" reflecting daily reality. And some will query the validity of this question, and arouse the temptation to reformulate it. First of all, let us lay out this path. The linear law of speech is both an obstacle and a relief upon analyzing a multidimensional phenomenon. It demands the examination of these interdependent (and therefore potentially copresent) dimensions only one at a time.

The Mongol and Siberian data has the characteristics of laboratory data. It comes from neighboring and related populations,[7] all having been equally subject to three different regimes (Russian Empire, Soviet regime, and free market economy) over the course of about a century. Recurrences and divergences will thus be meaningful. Recurrences, particularly, of the *expectation* kindled by play across the whole area throughout time.

Expecting an "effect"

In this way, to the Mongols, playing jacks often fills an evening among friends or neighbors, but a nomad must play jacks upon pitching his yurt in a new emplacement. Even if the main objective is only to pass the time, everyone tends to interpret the results in terms of the "effect" produced on the life of the players and their family, on their activity, or even on the weather; everyone sees signs which both foreshadow and are supposed to make happen what has been foreshadowed. Play is thus awarded a value consisting in the fact that we can expect an "effect" from it in ordinary reality, just as in French folk tradition we would expect, from an omelet offered to Saint Claire, the emergence of good weather!

The recurrence of a gap or a distance

Generally, in Mongolian or Siberian languages, the verbs "to play"[8] apply to the field of play without necessarily applying to the acts carried out within the field. Outside this field, these verbs designate precise corporal movements, which produce or are accompanied by sounds; and which belong to the usual behavior

7. Most of them are found in the three ecological environments of the area: steppe, forest or taiga, tundra. The most common language family is the Altaic family, with its three branches: Turkic, Mongolian, and Tungusic-Manchu.

8. Some of these languages have several verbs "to play."

of some animal species. These movements are not by themselves "constituting acts" of a field of play when performed by the animals in question, but they become such when performed in an imitative way by humans. Altogether, everything occurs as if there were no terminology specific to "play." Or as if this meaning could become the main meaning only in the long run, after a history of separating it from the precise meanings it has in contexts where it does not signify "play." Or even as if the notion of play had in itself a metaphorical feature, as I will try to show in the conclusion.

The fact that these verbs that mean "play" for humans designate nonplay behaviors for animals draws attention to movements and gestures as a means of communication from one species to another, and to the fact that playing inevitably has an imitative aspect. This predisposes physical or bodily dimensions to be concrete fixing points for the notion of play, and encourages their articulation with an imitative dimension; and the latter in turn suggests further links to further dimensions. Taken as a whole, a survey of these dimensions will show that playing encompasses most of the facets of man's relationship to the world and to himself, to the other and to society, and this from both an individual and collective point of view. Each of these will confirm in different ways the existence of a gap or a distance between the constitutive acts of play and the play frame. They will also confirm a gap or distance between the play frame and the empirical reality to which the former relates. But these gaps and distances are never absolute: there will be permanent interferences between orders of reality.

The Siberian data represents an asset from this point of view. The play it demonstrates illustrates an empirical reality not only by its constitutive acts, but also in a prospective way by the property assigned to if of provoking the *expectation of an "effect"* on another order of reality. The Siberian peoples assign this property to the mere act of playing, on a potential basis: they consider their collective Games decisive for the coming season, and never exclude the fact that the games they play in private may also have an "effect," even though the effect is unknown and uncertain. What is the basis for this expectation of a possible "effect" of the act of playing ? How can play, an act that exists only within and by its own execution, be perceived as likely to influence a field other than that in which it unwinds? These questions will foster the old debate on what separates play from rite, particularly in showing that some of the common distinctions are ungrounded.

Finally, the notion of distance will retain our attention. It will be rethought by calling on two concepts, those of "margin" and "metaphorization," which overlap without blending, and both have an essential place in the play process. I will show that it is within the margin and by the process of metaphorization that play occurs as a modality of action (in a broad sense, including the act of thinking), with its multiple dimensions and multiple uses.

CHAPTER FOUR

Buryat play
A case in point

This descriptive chapter presents the key reference, that of the Buryats living in the Lake Baikal area, which I chose because it is the most detailed in my documentation.[1] A Mongolian-speaking people, the Buryats hold a pivotal position in the area I study because they belong both to the forest and to the steppe worlds. Most of the description will be dedicated to the collective events the Buryats call Games, and more precisely to those they practiced up until the beginning of the twentieth century; the expression "Old Games" in this book refers to these.[2] Some have disappeared; others were transformed under the Soviet regime. The current era also comprises public Games, which have broad social consensus. When I strip the word "game" of its capital letter, I am referring both to the acts accomplished within the frame of the Games and to private practices.

1. I speak their language and conducted fieldwork research among them from 1967 to the end of the 1980s.

2. Unfortunately, it was not until the final proofreading stage that I discovered the Ph.D. defended by Stefan Krist at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, in December 2015 that is entirely devoted to Buryat "traditional sports competitions." Chapter 6, entitled "The Buryat traditional sports holidays," extensively relates their history.

Sources

Large historical stretches are covered by an abundance of sources. We owe a remarkable amount of ethnographic material, relating mainly to the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, to imperial Russia, which was curious about its vast territory, anxious to exploit it, and pragmatic enough to banish any undesirables there. In its internationalist beginnings, the Soviet regime promoted "safeguard ethnography." But later on, during the 1930s, with the goal of using ethnography to serve the construction of the *Homo sovieticus*, the regime guided research down a more repressive path. Another perspective predominates during the postwar years: ethnographers were tasked with spotting, amongst the remnants of the past, elements that had a "something progressive" about them, in order to reuse their form and insert in it a communist content.[3] As for contemporary Russian ethnology, this tends to look toward Western anthropology for inspiration.

For most of the Siberian peoples, for whose language the Soviet regime provided a written form in its early years, many publications are available to researchers recounting, both in autochthonous languages and in their Russian translations, the products of their oral traditions, epics, songs, tales . . .

Finally, I will use the material I collected myself in Buryatia and Mongolia during the last two decades of the communist era, and, as concerns the first two decades of the new regime, the rich documentation of direct observation brought back by other researchers from other regions of Siberia and Mongolia.

The Buryat people: A brief overview

The Buryats live in the Lake Baikal region, in Southern Siberia. At the time of their colonization by the Russian Empire, during the seventeenth century, those to the west of Lake Baikal around Irkutsk still mainly lived off hunting large game while developing cattle and horse breeding. As colonial pressure escalated, they dropped hunting in favor of a more diversified husbandry. The arrival of landless peasants, driven from Russia by the abolition of serfdom in 1861, pushed many a Buryat to share their farmer lifestyle, and, conversely, encouraged some groups to sink deeper into the forest. Most of them lived a mixed life (hunting and herding) as part of an *ulus* organization, communities made up of several lineages from at least two clans, which benefited from territories for

3. As advocated by Stalin, "national in form, socialist in content."

summering and wintering.[4] Their rituals in the pre-Soviet era serve as the basis of the descriptions put forward in this chapter.

On the other side of Lake Baikal, dryer weather and the vast forest steppe landscape favor extensive nomadic livestock breeding in the Mongolian fashion.

The cultural tapestry also distinguished the Western Buryats, for whom the Russian Orthodox Christian influence added to the shamanic background, from those of the east, for whom Mongolian Buddhism tended to absorb shamanism. The Soviet regime, by spurring population shifts, tried to blur these influences and modernize the economy.

Nowadays, Western Buryats are administratively attached to the province of Irkutsk within the Russian Federation, and the Eastern Buryats to the Autonomous Buryat Republic of this same Federation, where they account for barely more than a quarter of the population.[5]

The Buryat notion of play

In the dictionaries, the first meaning of "to play," *naadaha* (Mongol *naadah*),[6] is: "play, have fun, enjoy oneself." Most of the examples link it to dance as much as to music, theater (in the sense of playing a role), wrestling, chess, or card games. This verb also means: "to joke, to make fun, to trick," as it does in Western languages. It can also mean: "to move rapidly" for the wind (*salhi naadah* in Mongol) or "to twinkle" (reflection, light, ray). Even though the meanings other than "to play" are not mentioned in present-day Mongol dictionaries, they are currently understood by a majority of speakers. Thus, "mating" (birds, fish), mentioned in Konstantin Cheremisov's Buryat–Russian dictionary (1973), disappeared from subsequent Mongol dictionaries. The noun *naadan* is widely used with corresponding meanings (*hooroi naadan*: "grouse's mating"). *Naadaha*

4. According to the 1897 census (Patkanov 1912, III; Hamayon 1990a), the *ulus*' size ranges from about ten to more than a hundred persons.

5. With a tally of 272,910 individuals in 2002, Buryats account for only 27.8 percent of the population of the Republic bearing their name but whose government is dominated by Russians. According to the same census, they number 445,175 throughout Russia, heavily concentrated in the Irkutsk area to the west and Chita area to the east.

6. I believe this root is autonomous. Jacques Legrand links *naadah* to *naa-*, "toward here," and Marie-Dominique Even to the verb *naah*, "to stick." The verb derived thanks to the reciprocal suffix *naaldah* crudely means "engaging in sexual intercourse."

(Mongol *naadah*) applies colloquially to all preliminaries in love affairs in both Mongol and Buryat.[7] This verb conveys the idea of participating in a collective activity and is widely used in ritual contexts, secular and shamanic.

Mongol and Buryat pastoral nomads also use the verb *togloho* (Mongol *togloh*),[8] which means precisely "to jump, to leap about, to gambol, to prance about, and to frolic like domestic animals." Its use is rare among the West Baikal Buryats and in Mongol ritual contexts. The many games called *togloom* do not only entertain: they also ensure the "prosperity of livestock." They are usually games performed in private and requiring material support. They rely on skill and thinking (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991). Thus, knucklebones are *togloom*, and playing with them may have a ritual value.

COLLECTIVE GAMES

The noun *naadan* designates the games performed during collective rituals, and frequently the rituals themselves. We have consistent documentation relating to two of these rituals:[9] the Bride's Games, *basaganai naadan*, on the eve of her wedding (already on the way to being abandoned by the end of the nineteenth century, though the games continued to be a part of the wedding); and the collective ritual during which the shaman had to make the youth play (*naadaha*). The collective ritual disappeared with the Soviet regime; the latter nonetheless seized these games, separately and without any shaman, as an instrument to other ends. Today some of these games have been reformulated as part of ethnic, identity, or local holidays, sometimes under the name of *naadan* (in Mongolia, the national holiday is called *Eriin Gurvan Naadam*, the "Three Manly Games"),[10] some-

7. "Make the fish play," *zagas naaduulah,* is a euphemism for intercourse (oral communication by Grégory Delaplace).

8. It could be derived from the onomatopoeia *t'og t'og*, evoking weak but repeated blows (Mostaert 1944, *Dictionnaire ordos* III).

9. A third, more ancient one is known to us only through the expression *naadani hada*, "mountain of games," designating a burial ground: the living came to escort the dead and would dance in circle, and so would the souls of the dead just behind them (Galdanova 1987: 58); the latter were supposed to pursue a reversed life in the hereafter. This lasted the duration of a posthumous recycling before they could come back to earth to give life to a new being from the same line.

10. There is no morphological distinction between singular, umbrella terms and plural ones. The Mongols speak of the "Three Manly Games" in the singular in those

times under other names. All these rituals comprise the two same main physical types of games, which I call "dance type" and "wrestling type."

THE BRIDE'S GAMES PREPARE FOR LOVE: EMPHASIS ON THE HOPPING DANCE

For Buryats living under imperial Russia, the Bride's Games marked the opening of the wedding process, and represent the entire process in their epics.

They trigger the heroic trajectory in the epic narrative

> From my tender years and until my old age,
> I went on behaving as a son-in-law.
>
> – *Geser epics (Oshor)*, verses 13, 637–38[11]

The opening of the Games by the hero's future father-in-law in order to wed his daughter determines the heroic trajectory in the Buryat epics.[12] Getting to marry the woman he is "predestined" to marry due to an agreement between both of their fathers made while the future bride and groom are still very young is the hero's most pressing duty, his most difficult campaign. Upon hearing the rumor of his bride's Games, he rushes, but his quest is full of pitfalls because the father-in-law takes no account of the "predestination." At most he admits that the hero is a legitimate suitor and allows him to participate, along with the other suitors (who have not been "predestined" for their part), in the Games organized to assess their respective manly qualities. (Of course, the hero wins!) Once the father-in-law is convinced that he is not giving his daughter away to an unfit son-in-law, he confines them together in order to make them "play" (*naadaha*)

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foreign languages that force one to choose: "the" *Naadam* (or *Nadom*). I keep the capital letter for the national version of this event, registered in 2010 on the UNESCO's World Heritage list.

11. Text published by Mihail Petrovich Homonov, Vol. II (1964).
12. These are summarized and analyzed in Hamayon (1990a, 2nd part: 151–334).

. . . another type of game. A joyful feast follows, comprising dances and various games. Finally, the young couple leaves the father-in-law's camp.

From the hen party to married life

In daily life, the Bride's Games seem to revolve around the bride, and her alone; taking place at her father's camp, they allow her to bid her kin farewell,[13] relatives and neighbors she will have greeted one after the other, and who will have given her all kinds of gifts. Over the course of several days, this party brings the young people of the neighborhood together in her father's home. Since they are "players" (*naadashin*), during the round dances, all must dance, particularly, in the *hatarha* manner (*hatirah* in Mongol), that is to say, "to trot, especially in skipping and stamping the way reindeer and other horned animals do before mating," whilst exchanging provocative verses. On her last night as a maiden, the bride hides, free to spend it as she wishes. Those who shelter her cannot attend the next parts of the wedding. On the following day, the young people looking for her end up snatching her, in a mock abduction, from her friends, who have braided their hair with hers; they saddle her to take her, in procession, to her future husband.[14]

Baldaev describes this holiday such as his two grandmothers experienced it before their marriage at the end of the nineteenth century in the Bööhen area, to the west of Lake Baikal, where it is called *zemehen*, a term evoking fresh meat. Many kinds of games follow the feast. Pairs of youngsters perform a crouching dance, alternately given that it is so tiring. Then they fan out in two rows, each of which walks in turn toward the other singing a provocative verse, then steps back so the other row can do the same, until all are exhausted. Some mime comedy playlets. The last game, known as the hidden ring, opposes two camps (upstream and downstream, or east and west); members of one camp pass on the ring from person to person, and members of the other camp guess who holds it; all sing alternately verses of a song that ends: "We are done singing, may a reward [. . .] come for the boys and girls who have met; we are done playing, may the sun rise; we are done joking, may the rain fall." When the party is over, the girl presents

13. By the end of the nineteenth century, these games remain only the first phase of weddings in some remote areas.

14. Smolev (1898: 114); Chistohin (1899: 627); Petri (1925: 43); Baldaev (1975a: 158–59); Basaeva (1980: 160–73); Hamayon (1990b). In a former time, he had to abduct the young lady himself (Shelkovnikov 1868, quoted by Basaeva 1980: 174–76).

a tobacco pouch or a breastplate she has crafted to a boy she chooses. She thus indicates the right she grants him for her last night as a maid. This compels the young man to escort her during her visits to her relatives before her wedding, then to participate in the procession that takes her to her husband, and, later, to give a ewe or a goat to the firstborn of the young lady once she comes back to present the child to his or her family of origin (Baldaev 1975a).

The Bride's Games come to an end with the arrival of the groom, accompanied by his father and other relatives, who "bring meat" in order to announce the arrival of the live cattle, intended as the "bride price." The youth gathered around the bride's father's yurt sing and dance in *hatarha* fashion, "trotting and skipping." A long feast follows, where the guests, once sated, throw pieces of meat to each other as banter. Young people from both parties meet each other collectively in jousts and songs, and individually to wrestle, before dancing the *hatarha* again together. In principle, what is at stake is only participation in valued activities and players' prestige, but the final word and the final improvised verse in the rounds fall to the groom's party. The next day, the bride's party tests "the son-in-law's strength."[15] He must win, or else the marriage will be unhappy. The youth dance with "trotting songs" and "playing songs" and "play in chorus" (Baldaev 1959: 60–69). The last episode consists of the bride's faked and agreed abduction, where she is seized from her partners.

With hunting dwindling, this first phase of the wedding is losing its importance. Where livestock breeding predominates, it mostly comprises games organized as contests (wrestling, archery, horseracing). If the groom's party does not send anyone, the bride is "abducted" by men of her own party.

They disappear with the expansion of pastoralism and Buddhism

The development of livestock breeding goes hand in hand with that of the wedding's second phase, which ends by embodying in itself the marriage ritual. It is held at the young man's father's house. The young people still dance in *hatarha* fashion. Split into two camps, they sing challenges to each other, each camp outbidding in its verse the other's provocations. The bride is at the heart of the ritual, but in a different way. She must throw meat fat (*üühe hürtehe* or *üühe hayaha*) into the "chest pouch" of her father-in-law's coat: if some pieces fall off, conflicts

15. For the livestock breeders, the groom is compared to a bull and his party runs to "catch the heifer."

are bound to occur between the two newlyweds.[16] More importantly, she must pledge allegiance to the lineage of her future husband: it is called the "bride's kowtow,"—*mürgüümzhe*, or (*beriin*) *mürgel*, derivatives of the term *mürgehe*, "to head-butt," or "to hit with one's horns, to fight forehead against forehead," when talking about horned ruminants—whereby she must touch her forehead against the altar on which stand figurines representing her father-in-law's ancestors.

Head-butts and . . . head-butts!

A gesture of submission or allegiance here, "head-butting" is, on the contrary, an act of offensive and overbearing vigor in men's wrestling, a key element of the Games. The verb *mürgehe* then applies to wrestlers who try to repel each other, forehead against forehead. What separates the wrestler's "head-butt" from the bride's is therefore gender inversion, and overturning of the gesture's value. *Mürgehe* develops a submissive value where Buddhism spreads, in the pastoral area to the east of Lake Baikal. To prostrate oneself on a prayer plank in front of a temple and touch it with one's forehead is *mürgehe*, and expresses devotion: here again, whoever "head-butts" or "kowtows" submits him- or herself.

This verb finally developed the meaning of "religious ritual behavior," and more precisely "to pray," which reflects a completely different attitude from "to play" typical of Games and shamanic rituals. Since the shaman also "head-butts," in the twentieth century a neologism was invented for "shamanism": *böö mürgel*, "shaman(ic) head-butt."

THE SHAMANIC RITUAL INSTILLS A DOUBLE VIRILITY: EMPHASIS ON BOUNCING FIGHTS

> Like bulls, with their head down,
> they looked askance at each other,
> like reindeer, they rushed up in the air
> like bulls, they gored each other.
>
> – *Geser epics*, Ehirit-Bulagat version, verses 8414–17.

16. Hangalov (1958–60, II: 92–114); Baldaev (1975a: 121); Basaeva (1980: 160–73); Hamayon (1990b).

The only strictly shamanic collective ritual, performed "when there are leaves on the trees," combines two objectives. The first and only explicit one is to establish or confirm as such the group's shaman; the second is to insure the group's survival and perpetuation, along with the renewal of its natural environment by a sound management of their relationship: this is at the core of the shamanic function. The entire group participates in organizing the ritual. For nine days, the shaman and his nine assistants unrelentingly shamanize in order to make the youth "play," like in a wedding. However, since the end of the nineteenth century in certain areas, the celebration of the general renewal has cut loose from the shamanic institution. As it gradually became an autonomous holiday at the beginning of the Soviet era, the celebration of renewal developed into *Surharbaan*, "Archery."

Far from being mere distractions aimed at enlivening the ritual or at filling its gaps, the youth Games are a core part of it. They are watched by the severe elders as the latter feast. For a youngster, not playing would mean removing him- or herself from the group, and playing half-heartedly would herald an ill-prepared future. This is why the shaman strikes the calves of the tired dancers to force them up again.

The shaman's task: Making youth "play"

> A Hermes "of the start" encourages the athletes: "Come on! Courage! Banish soft indolence from your knees!"
>
> – Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant[17]

The games try to mimic animal behavior, in particular that of the male before mating as he repels his rival and courts the female. Buryats consider as dances the movements inspired by wildfowl courtship rituals, the sole match to the animal meaning of *naadaha*. Buryat folklorist Ulanov (1968: 7, 31, 33; 1974: 107) deems them exemplary as a "drive to action" or a "repetition before action":

> In the "dance of the large grouse or capercailzie" *hoiroi naadan*, or the "dance of the grouse," *hura naadan*, two crouching men, hands at shoulder height to imitate

17. *Cunning intelligence in Greek culture and society* (1978: 253).

> spread wings, skip on tiptoes opposite each other; they draw closer then move apart to let through a third dancer, representing the female; and all let out the wildfowl's cry. (Hangalov 1958–60, I: 220)

Buryats also consider the round *hatarha* a dance, inspired by the rut of an entirely different animal model, the great cervid, be it reindeer or moose. This dance also opens up a mating perspective, as the expression *gansaaraa hatarha*, "to trot or to skip by oneself"—which conveys the idea of vain or useless action—implicitly shows.

> The *hatarha* brings together about twenty to a hundred dancers who all hold hands and sing in unison the chorus: "Let us trot the moose's trot, let us trot the reindeer's trot" between verses struck up by one or the other. At first, they slowly rotate, with their hands down. Then, the circle grows closer, hands rise and fall, the rhythm of dance steps and songs soars. Finally, a very dense circle forms, jumps shrink and elbows are tucked to the side. The cycle starts again until exhaustion. (Hangalov 1958–60, I: 282–86)

The other type of game, wrestling, even more iconic of the collective exhibitions than the round *hatarha*, draws its inspiration from the same animal model: the fighters "gore" (*mürgehe*) or "mutually head-butt each other" (*mürgeldeh*) as the horned ruminants do during the period of rut. Wrestling (*bühe barildaa*) pits against one another, two at a time, in a variable number of single combats, men who must not, at least in principle, be inbred.

Each fighter thumps his thighs "to confirm his interest in participating" and imitates the way in which the raptor (kite or eagle) deploys its wings, to "show his vital strength." Just before facing each other, they both skip and paw at the ground in *hatarha* fashion. Then they take up combat position, knees bent and hands on the thighs. The Mongols call this "rut posture," *örölt* (Lacaze 1999–2000: 92). Hereby firmly installed, the fighters confront each other with the "moose's sideways glance," for he who looks down will lose.[18] Suddenly, one rushes toward the other, in order to head-butt him (*mürgehe*), namely he repels him with his entire forehead's strength, and then finally grabs him. The victor is he who forces the other to touch the ground: an elbow or a knee is enough.

18. That is what the Mongols say (see Niambuu 1976; Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991: 86–93; and, mainly, Lacaze 1999–2000 for Mongolia's National Holiday in the1990s).

The parallel between human and ruminant virility is confirmed by the metaphors the Buryat livestock breeders use. The bride's relatives who lead her to her husband in procession say they seek a "young bull"; those of the groom answer they have one "with horns, fat, always ready to head-butt to the belly."[19]

Hence, through dancing and fighting, the paradigmatic expression of male virility—the great horned ruminants, stag or bull—is conjured in both its aspects: sexual and aggressive. But wrestling is not round dancing, for it establishes winners and losers—it comprises an internal sanction—whereas the highest jumping dancer and the most eloquent singer achieve no victory.

The story of the Buryat Games shows the growing importance of the internal sanction (see pp. 95–96, 152–53, et passim). In the pre-Soviet era, victories remained isolated, without any aggregate effect. The stress was on participation: everyone had to be *bühe*, "sturdy; wrestler."[20]

In Mongolia, even the stunted boys and those prone to losing train from childhood, sometimes on nettle fields to dissuade them from allowing themselves to fall; " […] there is not a Mongol who cannot fight in a wrestling contest" (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991: 86), and the idea that a young man incapable of fighting will never marry was still widespread in the 1980s.[21] Here, though, at a public level, accumulated victories grant the wrestlers distinguishing titles.

The shaman's gestures: Loving approach and combat

The investiture ritual's main objective is to commit the shaman (*böö*) to his group. It also includes the "animation" (*amiluulha*) of the accessories (jaw harps, canes, drums), which enables him to carry out his function, and climbing trees,

19. *Hasharag buha, ebertei, targahan, hododoo hüniie mürgehöö hanaad iabagad han* (Baldaev 1959: 117). Only in words does the domestic animal set a good example. The ideal model remains the wild stag. The other play verb, *togloho*, which means skipping around for domestic animals, has no equivalent ritual use. In Mongolia, come springtime, boys and girls receive a horse from their parents in order to go to spend a night together in the wilderness. They can marry only after this getaway, called *zhonzhoo~zhonzhuu*—onomatopoeia that evokes the rutting camel's slow trot (Sendenzhav Dulam, personal communication).

20. In Mongol script, the wrestler *büke~böke* and the shaman *böge* (Cyrillic *böö*) share the same written form.

21. Participating in the Games resembles a rite of passage (the main function of play according to Thierry Wendling, 2002) but differs by its repetition (at least until wedlock).

which validates his ability to act as a shaman.[22] When the shaman "shamanizes," he hops, gesticulates and sways his hips, but his abrupt and uncoordinated jumps do not constitute a dance:[23] they aim at representing the loving male's approach in the world of spirits. The shaman must also "head-butt" (*mürgehe*), but his head-butts in the air do not constitute a fight either: they represent a combat against spiritual beings. Every shaman has his own way of acting "as if he were a moose":[24] his gestures try to be spontaneous and unique; his efficiency is attributed to the intensity of his commitment in the moment.

The idea that the shaman "acts like a moose" remained widespread in the 1970s, even though the reasons had been forgotten:[25] calling shamanism *böö mürgel*, "shaman head-butt," seemed natural, and the elderly mimed jumps, stamping, and head-butts in order to explain to me what "shamanizing" (*böölehe*) means. But when this verb's complement is the word "epic," it means "singing": from one ritual form to another, the main emphasis shifts from the gestural to the vocal field.[26] By the end of the ritual, the shaman embodies some *naadanai ongon*, "spirits of play";[27] he "welcomes" (*oruulha*, literally "introduces") them in himself so that the audience can see them through his mimes. He removes his belt and boots, which would otherwise prevent these spirits from entering. The

22. During the "cleansing" (during which his bare back is flogged with a bundle of branches dipped in flavored spring water), the shaman swears he will serve his group. He "animates" his props by inserting into them spirits supposed to ensure their efficiency. Then he climbs a tree, and from there swings from tree to tree in a row of nine, so as to show that the spirits support him because they prevent him from falling (Hamayon 1990a: 473–78).

23. These movements are not perceived as a dance (Popov 1981: 256), and, besides, doom any attempts at choreographic notation to failure (Zhornickaya 1966, 1978).

24. This crown with iron antlers is meant to evoke—and not copy—the animal, as policies hostile to shamanism have fairly well understood. Buddhism crowns the dancer's mask representing "the stag with large antlers" with real wood; in its theaters, the Soviet regime's atheist propaganda decked out the shaman characters' head in it in order to ridicule them.

25. This behavior is merely a convention at the beginning of the twentieth century, wherein the shaman mainly performs private rituals for some souls of the dead. It is significant that nowadays the new shamans do not seek to renew it.

26. Singing an epic, *üliger böölehe*, means singing it with a humming coming from the back of the throat (cf. "throat, overtone or diphonic singing").

27. I call "spirit" the nonempirical or immaterial entities conceived as relationship partners: spirits of living animal species and human spirits, coming from the souls of the dead.

first incarnated spirit hits the bad dancers in the back with a cane. Then comes a mime of the "head-butting"[28] animals, and finally, at the shaman's pleasure, a mime of the drunkard, the madman, the wronged husband, the trainer, or the pipe smoker (Manzhigeev 1978: 59).

The shaman's other task: "Head-butting" married men

The head-butting gesture founds another ritual, which, come springtime, gathers all the members of the group together, save the married women. Its "key episode" is, according to Hangalov,[29] on the night of a copious feast, the "head-butting" (*mürgüümzhe*). The shaman hops and sways before the heads of family—who each hold a plate laden with meat—in order to express the "presence" of animal spirits he has "welcomed into him." When the turn of the main Buryat tribe's principal founder, Lord Bull, comes, he walks on all fours, lows, scratches the soil, and head-butts the lower abdomen of every participant; the latter fall over backward. All strike up songs calling upon fertility.[30]

WHAT REMAINS OF THIS TODAY?

Contemporary Buryat society has not sought to revitalize the Bride's Games, but it does remember them. Buksikova (2004) significantly links the notion of play in Buryat tradition to dance: her book is titled *Traditional Buryat games at the end of the XIXth century and the beginning of the XXth century and the attempt to transform them into a national choreography*. Admittedly, the national holiday Games are seen as sports nowadays, even though some of them formerly belonged to the collective event associated with a shamanic ritual. Soviet power had already stripped them of their shamanic framework to transform them into sporting events or celebrations in its honor, simply reconstructing some of the

28. Noticeably the ibex bleating, the bull swinging his massive head and lowing, the bear picking up a scent and pretending to bite (Hangalov 1958–60, I: 326–27, 476–82).

29. Hangalov (1958–60, I: 515–522) devotes only the last page of his description to this ritual (see Humphrey 1973 as well).

30. Virility thus seems inherent to the shamanic function. In fact, there are women shamans, but they never lead the collective rituals: they are confined to private rituals.

key elements and changing some designations. Nowadays, the public Games are reinterpreted from the perspective of celebrating national identity and harmony with nature. In their different forms, they illustrate the continuing importance of the core movements of the "play" that occurs in them. They also illustrate the fact that they potentially hold moral and mental meanings and values. We find Games of similar type and reach among other Siberian peoples. It is time for a thorough examination of these movements. We will consider them through their ability to create a frame in which something entirely different unfolds.

CHAPTER FIVE

Lively rhythmical movements creating a fictional frame

> Nor doth glory stand on any worth more, in a man's command, than to be strenuous both of foot and hand.
>
> – Homer, *The Odyssey*

> I could only believe in a god who dances.
>
> – Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*

The Buryat notion of "play" seems molded to suit Bateson's definition, which I gave in chapter 3. The term *naadan* applies to the Games considered as a *context* for wrestling and dancing; but these fights and dances, constitutive acts of this context, are otherwise defined. Besides, the nonplay uses of the verb *naadaha* would not have surprised Huizinga: wind rippling through the grass, the twinkling of beams of light, fish spawning. The idea they share is that of recurring movement (rhythmical or wave-like). The great philologist noticed that many play verbs have similar uses in different language families. In the second chapter of his *Homo ludens*, he investigates Indo-European languages as well as Chinese, Japanese, and Algonquin, and highlights the following: in some languages, "the semantic starting-point seems to be the idea of rapid movement" (Huizinga

[1938] 1949: 32), in others that of "limited movement" or "lively rhythmical movement" (ibid.: 37), with a "faculty of repetition" (ibid.: 10). "As we have seen before, rapid movement must be regarded as the concrete starting-point of many play-words. We recall Plato's conjecture that the origin of play lies in the need of all young creatures, animal and human, to leap (Laws, ii, 653)" (ibid.: 37).

Victor Turner (1982a: 33) links the verb *play* to the Anglo-Saxon root *plega*, which means to train, to fight, to move with enthusiasm. Seduction and wrestling feature among the oldest meanings of *game*. In all dictionaries, the "game" entry comprises the meaning of venison: for instance, the tenth meaning of the *Oxford compact dictionary* (1971) states: "the object of chase, the animal or animals hunted." The website oxforddictionaries.com specifies the fifth meaning in this way: "wild animals or birds hunted for sport or food; [their] flesh used as food." Therefore, it is not insignificant that the games described in the following pages consist in imitating animal game.

Almost always to be found, the meaning of limited movement is never the sole meaning. Huizinga identifies other meanings (sham, mocking, party, competition, preparation, bet . . .), the recurrence of which from one language to another is all the more striking as the semantic divisions differ. But he does not try to establish any link at all between these various meanings and the broad range of "cultural phenomena" born "in the form of play" ([1938] 1949: 46, 145).[1] This is precisely what is at stake in the analysis of the Buryat example: identifying a link between their Games, on the one hand, and the two types of movement (dancing and wrestling) that constitute them, on the other hand. Such a link must exist because these movements are not given the same name inside and outside of the Games.[2] There actually is something within these Games that indicates that the wrestlers do not fight, or, as Bateson would put it, something that conveys the message: "this is play." These two types of movement, the association of which in the notion of play is very widespread throughout the world,

1. Huizinga tries to account for this polysemy by the opposition between "play" and "seriousness,," which he has previously declared "neither conclusive nor fixed" (ibid.: 5), and criticizes again at the end of ch. 2.

2. In French, "to fight" (*combattre*) and "to frolic, to play about" (*s'ébattre*), both derived from the verb "to hit, to beat" (*battre*), which means to strike repeated blows, could apply, in "non-play" context, to movements described as wrestling and dancing in a play frame. Formerly, one would "play about" at "shooting arrows" (cf. "'s'esbattait' autrefois à 'tirer de l'arc'" (Lamotte 1992: 41).

must therefore form *together* a context conveying the message "this is play,"[3] a frame in which action is "play."

As we begin our investigation into the association of two types of games—wrestling and dancing—in the Siberian Games, it is worth recalling that Tertullian had noticed the futility of attempts to analyze games separately: they had to be considered as a whole.

THE CLOSE ASSOCIATION OF TWO TYPES OF MOVEMENT AND THE CREATION OF A PLAY FRAME

In our base example, dancing and wrestling are linked both in the Bride's Games and in the shamanic ritual presented in chapter 4.[4] Movements of the head and rear limbs, the most frequently used in ritual gestures, are the only ones to be named in regular and specific fashion. These terms seem to consider the games only by their gestural aspect. However, these movements cannot be isolated from the sounds they generate, nor from the sounds accompanying them: dancers' steps on the ground mark time and circumscribe space concurrently; the round dance requires the dancers to sing; the presentation and victory of the wrestlers are accompanied by specific melodies. The idea that the body generates rhythm—sound and gestural rhythm—through its movements pervades André Schaeffner's chapter about the "bodily origins of music" ([1968] 1980). Movement places the body *simultaneously* in space and time; it creates a specific frame in which it can be seen and heard, and thus involves other bodies.

These movements draw their inspiration from certain animal species

Dancing and wrestling claim to draw their inspiration from animal movements; and this highlights the Buryat and Siberian use of animal terms to name them.

3. "The message 'this is play' thus sets a frame of the sort which is likely to precipitate paradox: it is an attempt to discriminate between, or to draw a line between, categories of different logical types" (Bateson 1972 [1987]: 146).

4. Let us recall that the shaman's gestures bear the same names and meanings as those of the dancers and wrestlers, even though they constitute neither combat nor dance. Let us also recall that Mongol script assimilates "shaman" and "wrestler" (see above, ch. 4, n. 20). Rolf A. Stein (1959: 331, 404 n. 32) links the religious and athletic aspects of the bard in Tibetan tradition.

The fact that they always go together in their Games drives me to analyze what links the corresponding animal behaviors. Two types of animals are taken into account: great cervids and wildfowl.[5] The fact that these are the sole animal categories to serve as models reveals a precise selection rationale. Not only does their physical aspect change with the seasons—as the stags' antlers fall and grow back, so the flora is renewed—but, most importantly, these categories are those that enabled hunters (as Buryats originally were) to subsist: moose and reindeer were game species par excellence, and then came grouse. The imitation of game species is quite common throughout the world. The animals imitated during this kind of ritual often constitute game.

> The Tucano Mai Huna of Peru's Amazon region, when the "ball of the peccaries" begins, run and dance while singing that the male who has testicles twists himself, dances and jumps, rides the female, and makes the humans laugh. During this ritual, men and women in turn play the male peccary and the hunter, and then the female peccary and game. (Bellier 1986: 539–43)

For the species chosen as role models, the male repels his rivals in order to beguile the female

In addition to their destiny as game, great cervids and wildfowl share a bewildering common trait: the male's ostentatious walk ahead of mating. Our poets boast time and again of the stag's majestic confrontations—sonorous and dramatic—and the grouse's deafening and twirling courtship ritual. For both these species, repelling the rival is the male's major asset in courting the female.

What are the human implications of associating these two types of movement?

A general answer to this question would be that none of these behaviors are solitary: none can dance or wrestle without reference to another. For a man, the "other" of the same sex must be treated as a rival to repel, and the "other" of the

5. Other animal species are imitated, but their imitation is not named as such, and is a side issue in the ritual. This mainly concerns wildfowl: cuckoos that announce game; cranes, geese, and trumpeter swans that forecast the seasons; birds meant to carry the soul by enabling it to "see" from a distance when it leaves the body. Flying enables them to "see" from a distance or from above, and thus spot game (Hamayon 1997: 97–120).

opposite sex as a partner to cooperate with. The same goes for human interpretations of animal behaviors. The "other" is a single opponent in wrestling, the outcome of which creates a winner and a loser; the "other" is a collective partner in the round dance, even though some sing and dance better than others. As for the shamanic ritual, this assumes that the shaman grants some kind of presence to another type of "others," immaterial and invisible, whom he treats either as rivals or as partners.

For each kind of movement, the intervention of variables expressing a certain latitude in the way the action is carried out adds to the presence of an "other": the motion in space implied by movement, and the duration in time implied by its repetition. Therefore, whereas these Games are a duty for the players[6] (as for every member of the organizing group), they always involve a margin of freedom with regard to the way they are enacted. Since latitude opens the possibility for manipulation, the Games also appear as an opportunity: for some, to exert pressure; for others, to demonstrate their difference, the latter clearly visible by the gestures' blatancy. The Games are not closed in upon themselves.

Another aspect is immediately perceptible: the difference that the duty of playing establishes between the two genders. All the young people must dance together, but only men wrestle; and they wrestle under the women's watchful eyes. The two main movements incorporated in the games—the jump and the head-butt—draw their inspiration from the attitude of the male of the imitated species; jumping being performed by both genders in dance-type games,[7] head-butting by men alone during wrestling. As they are performed, the games thus instill a double-sided ideal of manhood—aggressive and sensual—in both genders; each of which determines the other. If the men must embody this ideal, the women must cooperate. The two types of games complete rather than oppose one another.[8]

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6. The compulsory aspect of participation contradicts Huizinga's, Caillois' and many others' belief that playing is a "free and voluntary activity," and in addition, unproductive or gratuitous for Caillois ([1958] 1961: 10, 45, 51) and disinterested for Huizinga ([1938] 1949: 9, 15)—a widespread idea, though very controversial.

7. In Patrick Plattet's (2005: 227) analysis of Kamchatka's Koryak ritual choreographies, jumping has a core role, both in its presence and in its absence. The author highlights the sexual aspect, and observes a tendency toward skipping in feminine choreographies.

8. Even though both types of games are widespread across the world, I cannot institute them as a general model, ignoring as I do most everything of the potential female rivalries which could constitute alternate animal models.

LIMITS OF FUNCTIONAL EXPLANATIONS

Let us point out that this militates against the widespread interpretation by which wrestling and ritual combats aim at providing a channel for latent violence between individuals or even groups, even though they can also serve this purpose. It is a well-established fact that games and rituals are a space for interaction between the participants; and the works focusing on these interactions have rightly shown how these rituals ensure the regulation of social relations, especially with regard to conflict resolution, in both reactive and preventive fashion. But a play frame cannot eliminate violence by itself: some, such as the ancient Roman Circus Games, include some violence due to their rules; others, such as contemporary soccer games, without being inherently violent, sometimes give way to violence between both sets of supporters. Above all, celebrations and events such as the Games we study usually baffle the observers because of their warmth and because of their lack of squabbling.[9] In any case, the purpose they fulfill cannot by itself account for the forms the Games take. The prospect of a power relationship between men does not require them to face each other the way reindeer do. Furthermore, in our example, it cannot account for what links wrestling to dancing.

LIMITS OF THE NOTION OF *AGÔN*

The interdependence of wrestling and dancing also deters us from labeling them agonistic and nonagonistic, respectively, however suitable these qualifiers may be, and however well known to the anthropological field they have been since Marcel Mauss' *The gift*. Indeed, this book mostly investigates the agonistic aspect of trade in the *potlatch*. But even from the point of view of trade, the *potlatch* only partially accounts for its designation as *total prestations of the agonistic type* (Mauss [1923–24] 2016: 63), and the importance of the agonistic notion. These trades are certainly marked by rivalry (going as far as killing) and overbidding (going as far as destruction of property). But the reader is warned that trade exceeds economic utility: "In particular, such exchanges are acts of politeness:

9. The Ducasse of Mons (Belgium), or Doudou, held annually on Trinity Sunday is believed to so fascinate the inhabitants of Mons that there are neither murders nor suicides in the weeks before and after (Raepers, quoted in Hamayon 2001b: 96).

banquets, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, festivals, and fairs"; "everything is complementary and presumes co-operation" (ibid.: 6–7). It is Mauss' willful choice, therefore, to emphasize the aspect of rivalry in these performances, while leaving only a few footnotes for the data relating to play and dance elements.[10] This choice leads him to overlook the Chinook meaning of *potlatch:* "to nourish" or "to consume" (ibid.: 62), as well as its Kwakiutl meaning, "'feeder,' nourisher, and literally 'place of being satiated'" (ibid.: 62 n. 13). Of the Tlingit name "war dance" (ibid.: 74 n. 37), Mauss only retains the determiner "war" rather than the determined noun "dance." It is agreed that food and dance would have opened up other horizons. And even though he admits in his conclusion that he has "deliberately omitted from this study" dances, songs and processions, and dramatic performances that are carried out in turn, he considers that they embody nothing more than "an important aesthetic aspect" and source of emotion (ibid.: 193). Is the Christmas tree a mere "aesthetic aspect" of gift exchanges? Would we exchange gifts were there no turkey, no fir tree, and no decorations? Are the gifts actually essential to Christmas?

In fact, the debates opened up by *The gift* have remained focused on the expression of rivalries, to the detriment of what were judged, in contrast, to be entertainment perks.[11] Like Mauss ([1923–24] 2016: 115), his critics have mostly seen the "contest of wealth" aspect of the *potlatch*.

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10. Simple words from various languages are mentioned. These include, alongside the idea of play, those for dancing and fighting, for trading and betting; and, thus, they convey the image of a peaceful and intimate coexistence between them all (for instance, the Sanskrit *pan*).

11. Actually, even at the time when *game* and *play* mingled, one could note a propensity to exalt *game* and depreciate *play*. In this way, during an international colloquium about Greco-Roman archaeology (*Veni, vidi, ludique*) held in the Swiss Museum of Games in October 2014, the presentations were largely focused on board games, in which the counting of tokens, pawns, or balls determines the players' hierarchy, and perhaps their earnings. Certainly, these games—in which we count, win, and lose—leave behind more relics for archaeologists than those that consist in "showing" peculiar movements or postures. The latter were the topic of a single presentation, by Véronique Dasen, entitled "Saltimbanques et circulation de jeux." Numerous decorated vases and drawings represent performances of acrobats, tightrope walkers, and other entertainers. They had an ambivalent status: on the one hand, living off one's body was deemed defamatory and unworthy of a free being (fairground people were outcast, as were actors), and nobles played only board games; but, on the other hand, feats of skill would fascinate and astound them: the risk taking both lowered the entertainers' status, and proved the fairground people's bravery, thus arousing admiration.

However, two authors, Alain Caillé (1995, [2000] 2007) and Maurice Godelier ([1996] 1999), assert that understanding the notion of "gift" compels us to broaden its range by analyzing all its nonagonistic aspects at the same time. Both examine the agonistic and the nonagonistic *together*, through the mixed prism of rivalry and sharing. Caillé takes into account this "double-sided" feature—alliance and peace, on the one hand; rivalry and challenge, on the other—even though he deems it paradoxical (1997: 97), and observes that rivalry is rather masculine while sharing is rather feminine ([2000] 2007: 77–80). He sets forth a certain hierarchy concerning their institutional forms: conflict is subject to alliance (1995: 34). Godelier reassesses a little-known Maussian idea, that of the precedence of nonagonistic gifts. Agonistic gifts would be a transformed or evolved form of the latter. In this evolved form, the rivalry struggle prevails over the act of sharing; and simultaneously, in society, hierarchical gaps widen and exchange-marriage disappears. But Godelier then shows that the Northwestern coast's *potlatch*, which Mauss analyzed, is an exception, due to the hierarchical instability of its society. Among other things, Godelier[12] relies on the example of New Guinea. Owing to colonization, the competitive ceremonial gift-exchange system turned into a "commercial dance festival" (*sing-sing bisnis*) system. Godelier thus rules out a progressive and unequivocal relationship between the two forms, but notes a difference between them regarding the order of temporality: if they are nonagonistic, gifts and countergifts can be simultaneous (the latter restoring the balance disrupted by the former); but if they are agonistic, they have to be deferred (the overall objective being to create ever-continuing debts). Regarding this aspect, agonistic gifts have game-like attributes.[13]

Opponent and partner, partner and opponent

Several reasons keep me from using Maussian terminology, even though my approach confirms many of these two authors' conclusions concerning the relationship between rivalry and sharing. One is that, in a certain manner, every

12. Later on, we will see that, by contrast with the Games of the Mongols of Mongolia and of the Buryats, for whom the wrestling type takes precedence, the Games organized today by the Tu or Monguor (a Mongolian minority living in China's Qinghai province) have also become dancing festivals (information courtesy of Haiyan Xing, AAA conference, Montreal 2011).

13. Caillé ([2000] 2007: 213–15) compares play and gift from another standpoint, as a system of interaction characterized by the existence of a margin.

type of game combines—with varying degrees of intensity and proportion—agonistic and nonagonistic elements (or harmonic, if we want to abide by Jacques Godbout's nonnegative characterization). Though agonistic in itself, since winners and losers inevitably result from its practice, wrestling demands some kind of cooperation between the wrestlers at a general level, and collective dual games which belong to the wrestling type demand cooperation within each camp. Conversely, the round dance, seemingly unifying, creates emulating dynamics between dancers.

The solitary player

Another reason is that my data comprises game forms that are played alone (without a counterpart). With or against whom does the Mongol play who throws jacks? With or against whom do we play at cards in a game of patience? Is the object with which we play our opponent? We cannot apply to these forms of play a terminology implying bilateral relationships, without first showing that the player suspects the presence of an external agent before him. The latter can be either concrete—for instance, the active part of an object, such as the cup-and-ball's string—or immaterial—for instance, a spirit somehow contained in the object, and which the player sees as a counterpart, partner or opponent. But my examples show that the objects' agency or agent role is never fully accepted. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to keep the descriptive name of the two types of games in order to analyze them.

The notion of internal sanction

My analysis will put forward another distinguishing feature relating not to the nature of play but to the objective of the game being played. This criterion is the presence of a sanction pertaining to the game, and which ends it by making public a difference created by the very fact of playing it. The model is that of the sanction in wrestling: bringing the opponent to ground implies both a physical and strategic superiority. The public acknowledgment of sanction accompanies that of the intercession of mental qualities. In the Old Games, individual victories were not added up: the sanction was not acknowledged at the highest level. But the principle of sanction nowadays applies even to the dance-type games when they are organized as a competition. It applies by definition to the game played alone and aiming at a result, such as reaching a target, or obtaining a

specific layout playing jacks. Hence, the public acknowledgment of an internal sanction pertains to the characteristics of the games here presented. The history of the Siberian Games shows that, with time, the principle of an internal sanction expanded to all the types of games they comprised. As a context, the Games themselves adapted. Ultimately, the generalization of the principle confirms the prevalence of the agonistic over the nonagonistic. However, this applies at a more general level, where the relationships within society are at the service of a view toward action upon the world. For the internal sanction's purpose is not only to distinguish between rivals or opponents; it may also favor the production of an "effect" external to the game.

For similar reasons, I would not retain the opposition between play as "disjunctive" (because there is a winner and a loser) and rite as "conjunctive" that Claude Lévi-Strauss emphasizes.[14] Not only do both our types of games separate and unify; if games of the dance type do not make one side a winner and the other a loser, they also end up—once the internal sanction process has spread to all the Games—by classifying hierarchically, and thus implicitly, by separating. Besides, from another standpoint, given that an "effect" is expected from the Games as it would be from a ritual, it seems impossible to oppose game and rite in terms of function, since the notion of playing and that of performing a ritual act often seem to merge.

WHEN THE ASSOCIATION OF THE TWO TYPES OF GAMES DISSOLVES

Let us turn now to the relations between our two types of games and their variations. The latter are indicative of the contextual and ideological changes that marked the twentieth century in the eyes of the Buryats. Under imperial Russia, dancing had the edge over wrestling in the Bride's Games, and wrestling over

14. "Games thus appear to have a disjunctive effect: they end in the establishment of a difference between individual players or teams where originally there was no indication of inequality. And at the end of the game they are distinguished into winners and losers. Ritual, on the other hand, is the exact inverse; it conjoins, for it brings about a union (one might even say communion in this context) or in any case an organic relation between two initially separate groups, one ideally merging with the person of the officiant and the other with the collectivity of the faithful" (Lévi-Strauss [1962] 1966: 32–33).

dancing in the shamanic ritual's games (see *above*, ch. 4). The Soviet regime appropriated dances and fights, but separately, and in festive or sporting frames. Some Games thus survived, but their structure changed. Nowadays, they remain physical, but are increasingly competitive, ostentatiously rewarded by titles and other awards, and are reconceptualized as ethnic or national events; an "effect" is still expected from them, but in a different fashion, and with other words.

The founding principles of wrestling and dancing are also linked in the epic that the Buryat bards sang before the hunt in pastoral areas in pre-Soviet times. The hero's task is to oust the rival suitors in order to win over his bride. The epic conveys the same double-sided ideal of virility as in the Games and the shamanic ritual; it actually realizes it through the sung tale of the hero's actions; the epic thus shapes this ideal in an allegorical way.[15] By contrast, this draws attention to the resolution with which our Games involve the body for internalizing ideal values.

INVOLVING THE BODY IN INTERNALIZING IDEALS

> Cognition emerges from embodied practice.
>
> – Charles Godwin

The body's involvement in itself constitutes an unequivocal aspect of these Games. Formed as Games by physical practices, they instill these very behaviors and their associated values deep in the body, chief locus of the social subject's expression, and of his engagement with the world. Their bodily dimension, along with their compulsory aspect, entitles them to the highest possible degree of internalization. As a duty for all together and for everyone individually, participation in these Games makes *visible* the manner in which every young community member incorporates norms and values, and the manner in which every older member controls them. The movements' definitions are both flexible enough to allow individual adaptation, and sufficiently established to determine a transgression threshold. This internalization plays a role in the constitution of the self. For instance, in ordinary life, nothing is merely physical, and, reciprocally,

15. Here, I support Florence Goyet's (2006) idea: the epic triggers thinking not through concepts but through characters.

all that concerns the immaterial part of the person we call "soul" can be mirrored in the body. In this way, moving or talking proves that "the soul is in the body"—and we must eat to maintain it thus in the best possible shape—and, reciprocally, "having a soul in the body" is a way to express that we are human, alive, aware, and ready for action.

Formalization

There are some formalized movements that highlight a particular mode of the soul's presence in the body. Likewise, swift leaps and strong head-butts denote a person with physical strength (*hüch*), as well as its equivalent at the broader level of his being, power (*tenhee*). Thus, we will need to seek potential correlations with other situations where some formalization draws a relevant distinction: it is thanks to an amount of formalization that dancing differs from walking, and singing from speaking; and play and rite differ from other contexts as formalized contexts.

FROM MOVEMENT TO SOUND

Let us talk about the body's involvement in epic performance, which does not pertain to the sphere of play, but conveys similar principles, and raises analogous expectations to the Games. It seems to require nothing from the body, if not passively. The bard performs no specific movement, except for the precise pose he strikes: reclining on one elbow, eyes half-closed. The "effect" of his performance on the hunting season to come lies in the power of his voice and of his chant. Yet the power of his voice thrives on the audience's unremitting impulse; the latter prevent themselves from sleeping in order to allow the bard to see his epic through and the hero to reach his goals. Like the Games, the epic is a *collective duty*, but in the realm of sound and listening, and not of movement and exposure. The epic is an example of a formal shift in the participants' behavior and attention: whereas the Games are inseparable from the sounds they generate—just as the epic is inseparable from the bard's posture and the audience's diligent presence—from the former to the latter, the subjective assignment of an "effect" shifts from movement to sound. Sound—as much as movement—has its source in the body's life; Schaeffner ([1968] 1980) insists upon it: one or the other can be emphasized, in expression as much as in reception.

Yet the notion of sound, to which the societies we consider here have increasingly given attention throughout their history, is based upon a principle of movement, as Laurent Legrain shows (2011: 363–64) with regard to the Mongol (and Buryat) notion of *duu*, which embraces sound, voice, and song. Later in the book, I will have several opportunities to deal in depth with the modalities of this shift from movement to sound. I will also examine the place for the principle of movement, on the one hand, and, on the other, the intellectualization of the action aiming at generating an "effect" that this shift highlights.

THE FRAME'S CONSTRAINT: THE GAMES REMAIN EVEN THOUGH THE GAMES CHANGE

The current structure of the Games in Mongolia and Buryatia also indicates the culmination of an evolutionary process. These Games do not include dances anymore, but do comprise horseracing and archery, singing and jacks competitions—competitions which, without all being qualified as games in themselves, contribute to the ensemble named Games, and thus attract the associated values. As if the field of play, once established, could continue to operate as such, never mind the absence of its initial constitutive acts, nor the inclusion of other types of acts. In a way, if certain acts truly make up a category called "play," the existence of this category can in turn change other acts carried out within it into manifestations of the same "play." All in all, the relationship between the category of play and the two types of movements that constitute it in the Games we study looks promising, due to the existence of latitude at each point of the execution of these movements and of their association. I hope the diverse dimensions of play on which the second part of this book will now focus will keep these promises.

PART TWO

Play and its Multiple Dimensions

CHAPTER SIX

Bodily involvement and the creation of other dimensions

The physical aspect of play is both the most immediately noticeable and the clearest starting point from which to concretely begin the presentation of its multiple dimensions as a fictional frame. The previous chapter has shown that, even though the physical aspect can be autonomously observed from the outside, it cannot be analyzed without a simultaneous analysis of the implications and characteristics of the fictional frame, be it regarding objective behaviors or subjective effects. Thus, this offers a direct glimpse of the existence of other dimensions of play, in particular that of imitation, from which it constantly draws its inspiration. And, as we have seen, imitation refers to animal models only to separate itself from them, letting other dimensions of play unravel: psychological, social, mental, etc. It will turn out that the latter are strung together by various intellectual operations of abstraction or inference. I will dedicate a chapter to each of these dimensions. Every time, the notion of play will broaden its scope with new implications because of the gap between the realm of play and that of empirical reality, from which it draws its inspiration and to which it refers, at times developing new meanings. Here is a brief presentation of these dimensions and how they are strung together:

– Imitation, which explicitly underpins the physical dimension, is expressed in two different ways, which induce two types of relationships between oneself and the imitated model. Wrestling and dancing between humans are partially inspired by animal behaviors so as to define human relationship norms. The shaman's ritual behavior *simulates* animal conducts to grant some kind of existence to imaginary relationships with the relevant animal spirits. It is expected from both forms of imitation that they have an "effect" on empirical reality. This expectation is determined by *illusion*, in the sense of penetrating the realm of play: entering a game, Gebauer and Wulf say (1997: 44), is entering a world created by imitation.

– Imitation is the means of the *preparatory* role of playing. The imitated movements being preliminaries for the animals, the human play is seen as a prelude to or a training for action, or even as a prefiguration of action; in a certain way, *playing* prepares *doing* (nonetheless, the constituent acts of this *playing* and of the prepared *doing* are not identical). The duty to participate in the Games is based upon this preparatory role; as is the propitiatory value (i.e., of positive anticipation)[1] that play is believed to hold. This explains its ties to divination.

– In this way, through the two dimensions above, a *cognitive* dimension becomes apparent, encompassing all the levels of human presence in the world. The "play" they draw stages the individual in his relationship to others, and the group of players (or, beyond that, society) in their relationship to their counterparts, and finally humans in their relationship to the world, visible and invisible. This is how we account for the frequent use of "scale model" to characterize play and ritual. The association of two types of movements, one—wrestling—bringing two male opponents into conflict, and the other—dancing—uniting partners of both genders, establishes a structural link between opposition and complementarity in the ambit of general cooperation. However, they depend on men. The male position is that which controls the act of playing: therefore, I will devote a chapter to its sexual dimension. The male orientation of play explains the increasing domination of wrestling-type games to the detriment of dancing-type games, and the increasing importance of the principle of internal sanction illustrated by wrestling, in that it appoints a winner and a loser. Since

1. Céline Petit (2009) first had the idea of applying this expression, well known in psychotherapy and economics, to play (in this case for the Inuit).

victory demands qualities other than just physical skills, this orientation is also that of an intellectualization of play.

– This relationship between opposition and complementarity draws attention to the player's complex role, comprising *action on* and *interaction with*. It operates at a range of levels, of which our data provides a totalizing example. By proceeding with animal models, interaction between humans is both an action upon the world and at the same time an action needing interaction with the immaterial beings supposed to animate it. This leads us to investigate two further dimensions.

– One is the *dramatization* of play and what I call the *performatory* or *performative* (to adopt this notion from linguistics) role of play, seen as a representation of interactions with the invisible as *currently taking place*. A statement is said to be *performative* when it constitutes in itself the acts it describes; similarly, this representation is performative in the sense that it is supposed to fulfill the act it represents. The act it represents is believed to have an "effect" on empirical reality; therefore, it is ground for the participants' subjective *expectations*.

– The other is the player's *emotional and psychological implication*. This is linked to the fact that play, because of its preparatory feature, sets the player on an uncertain path in a temporality yet to come. It is defined by affective and behavioral corollaries typical of play, noticeably by collective expressions of joy destined to positively influence what is undetermined or unknown. It is also defined by an attitude, perhaps of belief, most likely of active commitment outside the play frame, which conveys optimistic and voluntaristic ethics.

– These ethics are future-oriented, and hereby highlight the *indeterminacy* inherent to play. The randomness of the game's outcome creates playing dynamics. The notion of luck is at the center of this dimension, as cunning is at the center of the dimension of *strategy* that follows in my presentation. They both institute differences between players, individual or collective. But although luck implies the intervention of variables other than the personal qualities of the players (notably, in our examples, the love of invisible female agents), strategy is exclusively human. In this way, luck is associated with love and abundance; and strategy with power, for which men quarrel.

– Luck and strategic cunning thus have political and social after-effects. Luck, randomly selective, leads to redistributive practices aiming at correcting the randomness of selection by luck. Strategic cunning, the expression of a mental superiority, fosters competitive spirit, and thus classifications and hierarchies.

It opens different power-pathways, but for different forms of power, one relating to charisma, the other to centralizing hierarchy, and both to manly virtues.

– Access to power through competition prompts me to reinvestigate the sexual dimension of play, which confirms it as a *male privilege*. This privilege is not about the differential properties of the male sex from a biological standpoint, but about the structure of relations in the sexual model, the latter making male selection a condition to the conquest of the female. It is about a series of nonbiological properties that we can regroup under the name of virility. This model is an opportunity to reinvestigate the connection between two notions, those of movement and alterity—alterity between the agent of movement and the space in which it unfolds—which indirectly prefigure the notions of margin and metaphor dealt with in the final chapter of this book.

– The final chapter will deal with both notions of margin and metaphor. These show the properties of play and determine it *together* and in interdependent fashion as a multidimensional process: its *metaphorical structure* and the *margin* it possesses for its fulfillment. This focus will enable me to isolate a homology between what play is in the field of action and what "metaphorizing" is in the field of conceptualization. Finally, it will enable me to suggest a hypothesis to account for the difference between ritual and play.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Imitation
Doing "likewise," doing "as if"

> How to defend the griffon, some said, if this animal does not exist ? It must exist, others said, since Zoroaster does not want us to eat it. Zadig sought to find consensus between them, saying: if griffons do exist, let us not eat them; if they do not, then we shall eat still fewer of them; in this way, we all shall obey Zoroaster.[1]
>
> – Voltaire, *Zadig*

The physical nature of our Games has placed the imitative intent at the heart of the play notion. Human movements intend to imitate animal behaviors. As Bateson wrote (1979: 125), they "have a different sort of relevance and organization from that which they would have had in non-play" (in this case, in the animal context); they evoke, and thus reinvent, the meaning of the movements. Players do not try to imitate animals, to identify with them, rather they bring some of their behaviors to mind by establishing their own way of performing

1. "Comment defendre le griffon, disaient les uns, si cet animal n'existe pas ? Il faut bien qu'il existe, disaient les autres, puisque Zoroastre ne veut pas qu'on en mange. Zadig voulut les accorder en disant: s'il y a des griffons, n'en mangeons point ; s'il n'y en a point, nous en mangerons encore moins, et par là, nous obéirons tous à Zoroastre."

them as different from the animals. On principle, their imitation is both *selective* and *partial*; in particular, it absolves the players from the follow-ups that the imitated movements imply for the animals. In this way, imitation is an essential factor in generating a field or realm separate from that from which it draws its inspiration, and in the fact that the players' movements create a fictional frame. And in turn, this fictional frame, being shaped by the choices of imitation, guides the interpretation of what is performed within it.

The shamanic ritual also reinvents by mimicking. The shaman's gestures are also inspired by the same animal models, but the imitative model differs: it *includes* the future developments of the animals' movements. This is why I call the shamanic ritual a simulation: it aims at other goals and impacts.

First, let us take a look at what separates these two imitative modes.

DOING "LIKE" THE OTHER: PLAYING AMONG HUMANS

The young people who wrestle and dance *do like* the cervids and wildfowl, but do it *between themselves*. *Doing likewise* aims not at replicating animal behaviors but at creating human movements that recall some of their features. It consists of a human reappropriation of animal behaviors *isolated from their behavioral context*. For the animal, the behaviors that give rise to wrestling and dancing set in motion an operational chain: in this case, self-defense and reproduction. The courtship behavior of birds prior to mating is not "play." Not that animals do not play, but when they play, they perform not the represented action but something else. This goes for the young who runs and smells like the hunting adult of his species, but does not himself hunt; and the puppy running after the ball his master has just thrown, which also "plays." Unlike the animals they imitate, humans do not commit themselves beyond their wrestling fights and dances. The latter are self-contained within the Games. The humans' *doing likewise* in these dances and fights establishes them as a fictional frame, for the frame dictates that the participants perceive in the dances and fights the reflection of existing familiar animal behaviors. Inasmuch as it favors an interpretation, this frame is *fictional*, but not fictitious or fake. Conversely, participating in these Games implies accepting[2] to imagine things like this fiction suggests. Witnessing these

2. Accepting to imagine a proposition does not necessarily imply "believing" it, nor even accepting it as likely. About the notion of "belief" and its complexity, see below, ch. 12.

Games without accepting the shared cultural fiction means excluding oneself, and being nothing more than a detached observer.

Everything in this imitative mode is the result of a choice: when young people "trot" or "head-butt" like cervids do (the verbs are those used for these animals), they do not get down on all fours. They stay standing, because their movements make up dances and fights *between human beings*. By its fictional power, and by its inherently selective and partial aspect, imitation explains that the Games give birth to representations, expectations, and even emotions relating to the participants' understanding of the animal behaviors concerned. It also explains that dances and fights are marked by a great flexibility, having changed their forms without ceasing to be human dances and fights (*games*) inspired by animal models, and without ceasing to be formed as a fictional frame (as *play*).

As time goes by, imitation wanes and the Games remain

History witnesses the broadening of the fictional frame (the *play*) as it comprises more and more *games*, and as the latter free themselves from the imitative models that gave birth to dances and fights. Throughout Siberia, the Games that once belonged to shamanic rituals survived the Soviet regime's elimination of the shamans who led them. And once they became autonomous, they continued to integrate new wrestling-type games to the detriment of dance-type games. Nowadays, an "effect" is still expected of the Games: celebrating the renewal of the community performing them, with and within its environment, they are supposed to increase the quality of this renewal. Under imperial Russia, in the pastoral areas of Buryatia, the Games had already incorporated archery and horseracing. But neither archery nor racing is imitative in the way that wrestling and dancing are. In a nonplay frame, shooting could be a hunting act, or an act of war. But at the time, the hunting lifestyle had become obsolete, and tribal wars had come to an end.

In the 1930s, the Soviet regime transformed the Games, stripped of all shamanic references, into a sporting event. In order to spread the *Homo sovieticus* ideal, it entrusted ethnographers and atheism specialists with the task of identifying among the various nationalities those "traditions" able to support the project. Seemingly, the Games were one of these useful traditions: they came with an organizational structure, temporal points of reference, and a physical medium useful to health policies. Even though socialist realism disapproved of the forms ideologically, in practice, it often took hold of well-tried popular

forms, and changed their content. In this way, the round dance is separated from wrestling and incorporated into other festive frames, not linked to the event or to the season. Its name changes from that of a movement (*hatarha*, trotting and skipping) to that of a sound, the onomatopoeia *ieeher*, which gives its rhythm to the dancers' steps and the choruses of the accompanying songs. The lyrical content of these songs is also renewed.[3] As for wrestling, it becomes a competitive sport within the *Surharbaan* ("Archery") holiday, while the space given over to dances decreases.

Back then, the *Surharbaan* took place on the day of the Buryat Republic's creation in 1923 (Buksikova 2004: 10); it glorified local, regional, and ethnic identity.[4] Even though its name means "archery," this event also included horseracing, and sometimes singing and dancing. The emphasis on shooting seemed to embody the local inflection of the ideal of competitive sports promoted by the Soviet regime. Nowadays, even though it has been reinterpreted once again, this celebration retains its seasonal aspect: it can only take place outdoors, during the summer, because it celebrates "harmony with nature," a crucial condition of the smooth progress of the year to come. Shooting comes third in the homologous Mongolian holiday, the Three Manly Games,[5] in which, paradoxically, given the virile claim this name boasts, some female competitions take place.

DOING "AS IF" WE WERE THE OTHER: SIMULATING, PLAYING TO BE THE OTHER

Formerly, the shaman's ritual behavior drew its inspiration from the same animal behaviors as wrestling and dancing, and they were directly indicated by the

3. The chorus of an *ieeher* song I recorded in 1968 in south Buryatia glorifies the Buryat contribution to "(military) defense of the USSR" (Hamayon 1973, song no. 10). It would have been created in 1927. However, nowadays, the *ieeher* choruses still use the verb *hatarha*, "to trot," to say: "to dance."

4. In the autonomous region of Inner Mongolia, the Naadam lead to two celebrations: one organized by the public authorities of the Chinese state, and the other by minority populations (Aurore Dumont, presentation at the International Conference "Human–environment relations: Skills, knowledge, emotions and politics in Siberia and China (Evenk and Even peoples)," University of Versailles Saint-Quentin 2013; see also Dumont 2014: 2014: 106, 206 and passim).

5. *Eriin Gurvan Naadam*. Nowadays, archery is disappearing from local celebrations (Lacaze 1999–2000: 75).

verbs used for animals. It could be said that the shaman "kowtows" (namely head-butts), "jumps," "trots," . . . He had to perform not *like* an animal, but *as if* he were an animal himself. The following anecdote illustrates the influence—still valid for other cultures—of such movements, mainly jumping, for the shaman's characterization.

> In Seoul, in July 1991, Korea, proud to have hosted the Olympics three years before, hosts the third congress of the International Association for Shamanic Research, in which several Korean shamans participate. The sessions are followed by rituals that end in dances bringing shamans and conference participants together. During a dance, a Western researcher earns the admiration of Korean shamans (most of the *mudang* are women): he jumps. "How high he jumps! Would not he make a great General [the type of spirit to represent]! What a great shaman he would be!"

During these rituals, it is expected of the shaman that he *really do*, in the world of the invisibles, what the animal he impersonates would do in reality, namely that he *fight* his rivals, that he adopt a *courtship behavior* in order to please she who will be his partner in love. Simulation builds the field of ritual as a fictional frame, as a *play*, and gives a form of existence to immaterial beings. This fictional frame does not monitor regulated games, but other acts of simulation, namely other *plays*, to which it grants the status of *genuine action* (*genuinely carried out*) within the realm of play.

Whereas the wrestler really head-butted his rival in a frame meaning he was not fighting, the shaman does the opposite: he head-butts in the air, and the ritual frame requires participants to understand that he *really* is fighting, against an invisible rival in the world of invisibles. He is supposed to fight in order to repel another shaman looking, like him, to take the form of an animal among the animal spirits on behalf of another group. Whereas fights and dances were isolated from the context of the corresponding behaviors for the animals concerned, the shamans' movements are replaced in the context to which they belong for the animal. The shaman must act in a way that appears to be *real and contextualized*, so as to validate the hope that his action will have, in ordinary reality, an impact parallel to that which head-butts and jumps would have in the animal kingdom. We need not be surprised by the fact that the shaman's movements seem confused and resist any attempt at choreographic notation, unlike the stylized movements of wrestlers and dancers. It is required that they

look as though they are improvised, that they vary from one shaman to another, or from one ritual to the other for a particular shaman. Their uniqueness is the sine qua non of the "effect" expected on ordinary life, and based on how they are received by the participants. The shaman must convince them that he *truly* has obtained "luck" for hunting, so that, bearing this "luck" with them, they commit to go hunting.

Far from pretending to be an animal, the shaman hereby assumes an animal identity in addition to his own human identity, and demonstrates the corresponding behaviors and relationships. His simulation consists of giving to the spirits supposed to rule over game what Louis Marin ([1980] 2005: 72) calls an "effect of presence" among the participants.[6] Where literature speaks of charisma, the Evenk people simply say that their shaman "plays well" if he manages to make the spirits of game present enough, in the frame of the ritual, for the people to think that he acts upon them.[7] He must give an "effect of presence" to the spirits and an "effect of reality" to his interaction with them.[8] In this respect, simulation foreshadows the hunt itself. Here, there is a clear and direct relation from a specific form of play to a specific form of empirical reality. This is an uncommon case of nearly symmetrical similarity. Therefore, it is worth recalling the conceptions upon which ritual is based, and which arise from living off hunting, especially since hunting comprises numerous elements bearing other dimensions of play.

RITUAL IMITATES HUNTING, HUNTING IMITATES RITUAL[9]

As a lifestyle, hunting amounts to assuming ownership of goods that cannot be produced (game is thus felt to be "given" or "giving itself") and appear at random. It asks an important question: How to avoid the retaliation provoked by the taking of wild game, and how to ensure that the game will "come back"?

6. Also, it is better not to "play" alone in ordinary reality: this would mean, the Nganasan say, risking tempting a "spirit" *ngo* (Gracheva 1983).
7. This is not the case of "playing spirits"(*naadanai ongon*), evoked in the previous chapter, that the shaman embodies at the end of the ritual; they are not vested with the power of influencing reality.
8. Simulating is not pretending, which would be "ill playing."
9. This reminder is based on earlier analyses of the rituals of hunting peoples (Hamayon 1990a).

The answer of the Siberian peoples is based on the principle of the food chain: each species feeds off one or several species. As they feel they are only one species among others, the humans establish the animal species that they want to eat as partners, in order to "trade" with them according to rules governing human groups. To each species they assign a "spirit," a kind of generic soul. The spirit of a species is not an individual being. It is common to all the living animals of this species without being linked to any one of them in particular;[10] it is supposed to grant the hunter access to their bodies without itself being exposed to his shots. For these peoples, managing a good settlement with the spirits of edible species is the shaman's primary task.[11] According to this settlement, in exchange for the game they take, the humans must let the spirits of the wild species (those of birds of prey and carnivores, acting on behalf of the herbivores) consume, through their flesh, their vital strength. The humans will lose their vital strength, but—thanks to the shaman—as little as possible. They will die, but—thanks to him again—as old as possible. Their great ritual performed at the beginning of the season aims at renewing this agreement (see below, ch. 10).[12]

To institutionalize this agreement, the ritual stages an alliance:[13] the shaman "marries" a game-species' spirit's *daughter* or *sister* (she therefore has a father or brother), and hence becomes legitimate as a hunter in her world. This "spouse," imagined as a large female moose or reindeer, represents wild game. Her "wedding" socializes her without humanizing her, for in remaining an animal she gives her "husband" access to her fellow creatures.[14] She is not an indi-

10. For these peoples, all animals have an individual soul which is said to be reborn after death in a new animal of the same species. This explains the reappearance of wild game in autochthonous thought.

11. Throughout history, other functions—therapies, for instance—overshadow this one; their form is explained only by the fact that they are derived from it.

12. Generally speaking, many seasonal rituals aim at updating a contract with entities upon whom depends the group's legitimacy to occupy its territory. Thus, in ancient Rome, "in play, there is an organic presence of the idea of a contract passed with the gods" (Clavel-Lévêque 1984: 134).

13. For the Shors, a Turkish-speaking group of the Altai, the shaman's "spouse" is embodied by her drum; the latter, wrapped in a headscarf in the manner of Russian peasants, is installed where the bride sits, then "abducted" by the shaman, like the bride is by her husband on her wedding day (Alekseev 1984: 134–36).

14. The underlying ideology's logic would also want their marriage to be fertile and ensure the game's reproduction. The idea is not explicit in Siberia, but it is in Amazonia (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1973: 90, 160–61).

vidual being, but a generic entity. Every shaman "marries" her, and each one of them makes her his "wife," without assigning her a personal name.[15] Dressed in a moose- or reindeer-skin costume and an antler crown, the shaman shows, through his head-butts, that he repels the rival shamans, the latter imagined under a similar animal form; and through his trotting and stamping, that he courts his "spouse" in order to get from her "luck" for the hunting season (game pledges).[16] It is clear that she "loves" him for his vitality, and not because he is her "husband."

The shaman behaves as if he were an animal without hiding the fact that he is a human. He gesticulates like a quadruped, but remains standing throughout. His costume, of animal fabric, bears the name of its function: "armor" (Buryat *zebseg*) or "cuirass" (Mongol *huyag*). The antlers decorating his crown are reminiscent of the virile wooden antlers of the great cervids, but they are iron, the material of human weapons. Songs are born of his imitations, his bellows, and his bird calls. All these tangible details contribute to the perception of the shaman's gestures as *real* interactions within what is clearly seen as a *fictional* frame of action. This is the double condition by which victory over his peers can foretell that of his community over rival communities, and the "luck" he retrieves foretells the game the hunters will collect. The shaman must simulate in a way that allows the hunt prepared for to correspond to the hunt hoped for.

Another instance of simulation takes place at the end of the ritual: the shaman lies down on his back, lifeless and quiet, *as if* he was letting animal spirits feast on his flesh, a pledge of human vital strength as counterpart for the promises of the game obtained. His position gives further justification to his moose-skin costume: not only does he bear the status of "husband" of a game spirit; he must also finish as game himself.[17] As he simulates his own death, he foreshadows

15. Believing it has intentionality and agency does not mean considering it a person. Regarding a similar case, Tim Ingold writes: "It is the type rather than its manifestation that is personified" (1986: 247). Rather than "is personified," we will say, "made a subject, an agent." Moreover, this subject status only counts within this field.

16. The better he knows how to entice her, the more abundant the prospects of wild game. To the Evenk of the Yenisei, the ritual materializes them in the form of reindeer hair. The shaman fakes catching some hair in his drum, which he waves like a lasso. Then, the participants ask him to increase the number; he mimes drawing some from a bag, which she is held to have under her armpit, under the pretense of delousing her (Anisimov 1958: 29; Delaby 1976: 68–69).

17. Let us recall here the English expression "to die game," meaning "to meet death resolutely" (Oxford compact dictionary 1971: 38).

imminent deaths within his community.[18] The participants know these deaths to be inevitable as a part of the exchange with the game-species, and a condition for its perpetuation, but they expect the shaman to postpone them and limit the number of casualties as much as possible.[19] In this regard as well, ritual simulation looks to correspond to the reality wished for the hunting lifestyle.[20]

TOWARD NONGESTURAL IMITATIONS

For the Buryat livestock breeders, the hunting season is conditioned by an epic performance. To their mind, the bard's song is supposed to bear an "effect," much like the shaman's mime. The name of the epic, *üliger*, highlights its intrinsic imitative dimension. This term, common to the entire Turko-Mongolian family, has the generic meaning of "model, example," and can be a reference for comparison, illustration, and imitation. It applies to tales in Mongolian, to sayings in Kalmyk, and to riddles and feats in Ordos.

Games, shamanic ritual, epic performance, here are the three fictional fields purposely constructed so that the acts of which they are constituted may have an "effect" on real life. This drives us to question what appears to be the preparatory dimension of "play." But before that, I would like to enhance the imitation data with examples originating from neighboring peoples, for whom "to play" applies both to the Games and to shamanic action, before making a few comparative comments.

Imitation in Tungusic ritual play

For the Tungusic people (Even[21] and Evenk[22]), the main collective ritual comprises games based on the imitation of animal behaviors. It unfolds as a hunt

18. According to Thierry Wendling, symbolic death in a game is widely accepted, but any activity leading to death is rejected as a game (communication during a workshop, 1992).

19. This is why Hocart says: "Sacramental death is fictitious" (1954: 109).

20. This reasoning enables us to understand the ideal of "voluntary death," common among these peoples, of the hunter who, having ensured two generations of descendants, sets off alone into the forest in order to "give himself" to it.

21. The Even (17,500) or Lamut, northern Tungusic people, live in the Verkhoyansk area.

22. The Evenk, the most important Tungusic group, number 35,000 both in Siberia and in China.

and stages an alliance with spirits of the hunted species through cooperative relationships in hunting, as in ordinary life. These "peoples of the reindeer" (the only ones to live off both hunting and herding the same animal species) afford great importance to their renewal ritual. The Even researcher A. A. Alekseev (1993: 32) writes: "By dint of singing and dancing, mountains laugh, peaks sing, and springs spawn." He conveys a desperate obsession: "Let us imitate the birds in order not to disappear from this world." "If we want to live well, we must play well," echo the Evenk; it is a "key sentence" for them, Alexandra Lavrillier (2005: 492) writes in her thesis, to which she gives the subtitle: "Playing to live, with or without shaman." (The author developed this conception further recently [Lavrillier 2013].)

To designate this ritual mode of action, the Even and Evenk use different roots, respectively *evi-* and *ike-*. Each of these verbs includes dances and songs, calling upon movements and sounds (ibid.: 500). In her dictionary, Cincius (1975–77) gives the following meanings for *evi-* (II: 434): "to play; to dance and sing in the traditional Tungus manner; to wrestle, to compete; to play a musical instrument; to play on stage, to play act; to joke, to tease; to mate (grouse, capercaillie, squirrel); to jump; to make (decorations, embroideries) . . . in a competitive atmosphere." And for *ike-* (I: 301): "to sing, to dance along with singing, to improvise verses along with dancing a round dance; to enjoy, to make fun, to shout when drunk," and then, among the numerous dialectal or derived meanings: "to perform a hunting ritual, to shamanize at the hunting ritual at spring; to peep (squirrel)." In everyday language, *ike-* is used as a broad meaning of play (Lavrillier 2005: 494–97, see also Lavrillier 2013).

The term shaman comes from another root, the Tungus verb *sama-*, which belongs to a common Altaic root. It applies to gestures: focusing on movements of the lowest part of the body: to move legs, to skip, to jump.[23] Thus, terminology of play in Tungus languages is extremely rich and complex. A. Lavrillier (2013) provides an in-depth semantic analysis of it and and its relation to the terminology of the shaman's action.

Up until the end of the 1930s, children were encouraged to "play the shaman" (ibid.: 498, quoting Vasilevich 1927). The shamanic spirits were also supposed

23. Lot-Falck (1977a: 9–11); Lavrillier (2005: 496–97; 2013). Words derived from this Altaic root *sam~kam* mean "to get restless," "to stir" (back legs) in Mongol, "shaman" in some Turkic languages of Siberia: *kam*, from which Russian *kamlyat'* "to shamanize" and *kamlanie* "shamanic rite" are derived.

to "play." As the "electing" spirit of a Tungus shaman is supposed to have said: "We were accustomed to 'playing' with your grandfather, let us 'play' with you as well" (Shternberg [1893] 1936: 173–74).

Many dances are modeled on birds whose courtship ritual is deemed striking enough. For the Evenk of south Yakutia, the wood grouse plays this role (Lavrillier 2005: 52). An Evenk dance mimics the wood grouse's courtship behavior in a form different to the Buryat dance: young girls crouch, hands behind their back, flap their shoulders like wings, and hop about, while a dancer spins around them, leaping and flapping his arms (Zhornickaya 1966: 94–95).

The favorite model for the Even's long rounds punctuated by occasional screams is the whooping crane, a migratory bird whose return heralds that of good weather: "Our soul sings and rejoices, likewise the cranes flying to the heights" (A. A. Alekseev 1993: 31). Bodies spin, voices try to chirp, and arms blend together, mimicking wings.

But in all these rituals, the reindeer remains the main inspiration for dance steps and competitive games, particularly wrestling. In the latter, young people "test their strength," forehead against forehead, like reindeer battling, sometimes with branches, which they hold on their heads until these have broken to pieces completely.

The Even subtly shift from the bird model to the quadruped, and from the animal model to the plant. They do this by changes in their voices and movements in their sung round dances: whooping cranes become reindeer, and the reindeer's antlers become evergreen branches. The fast-paced phase of the round reminds the living of their duty to live: "Our legs carry us, let us make them move, let us put some enthusiasm on our faces." The dancers' steps imitate the young reindeer's trot, and the voice of the former mimics the roar of the latter. They "proudly" raise their heads, grab each other's elbows, sway back and forth, and challenge each other. "On Earth, reindeer are born and trees grow, the Sun heats and the river runs" (A. A. Alekseev, 1993: 30, 31, 50 etc.).[24]

24. During other rounds, dancers in their circle also imitate flocks of wild geese, trying to honk like they do; and in some comedy playlets, the life-cycle of these various wildfowl birds is represented. The Evenk add a number of differing jumping contests to the rounds (over a fallen tree, or a bow, or a hare's corpse, in crouching bounces), and also lasso-throwing contests, reindeer sled races, games of skill and discovery with two teams, male and female. Formerly, the Even would also fight with their fists, grabbing each other's middle fingers or belts to make the other fall, and race until they fainted from exhaustion. The Tungusic people of the Amur use another

Imitation in the Yakut ritual play

As in other Turkic languages, the Yakut verb "to play" is derived from the *oy-* root; and its main meaning is "to jump, to leap (about), to spring up" (Lot-Falck 1977a: 15–16).

The oldest dictionary (Pekarskii 1907–30) records, for *oyuun*, the following: jumper, leaper (about); shaman, priest, magician; spinning top (the trajectory of which is important);[25] and for *oyuulah*: to jump, to leap about, to shamanize. The link between leaping about and shamanizing is found in yet another term, *kyyr*, the meaning of which has shifted from the movement performed to the sound it generates, since a modern dictionary (Slepcov 1972) notes, for the derived term: to shamanize, to ring, to resound loudly.

Playing also has a sexual connotation, as the expression "man who jumps (gambols) in order to find a woman" demonstrates. Likewise, one of the derived forms of the word *oonn'oo* ("to play, to joke, to have fun") is *oonn'oos*: "to make a pass at sb., to flirt."

Besides, from one dictionary to the other, the main meaning of the *oy-* root passes from jumps to ornament, decoration. Some adornments aim at protecting dwellings, and some embroideries in the garments' lining at protecting he or she who wears it.[26] It is believed the custom of adorning spread as a way to skirt the shamanic ritual's prohibitions: adorning means playing in the sense of performing a ritual act, in the same manner as jumping, dancing, or wrestling. A similar link is found between the name of the sung round dance *ohuo ohuo ohuoxai* (a triple-time dance: invitation, stepping dance, jumping dance) and the verb that means to adorn, *ohuordaa*.

"play" vocabulary altogether, about a ritual known as the "bear festival." This ritual differs from those presented in these pages, in that it comprises the killing of a bear captured young and then raised by the human group; it resembles them in that it is marked by races and shooting contests, and in the atmosphere of increasing sexual freedom that spreads there (Kwon 1999). See also Sales (1980) for the "bear festival" of the Nivh and Ghiliak of the Amur.

25. We encounter the image of the spinning-top in Hasidism, to illustrate the idea that dance and gesticulations show men the way to God, as David once did, spinning in front of Yahweh (e.g. Eisenberg, Josy. 2009. *Dieu et les juifs*. Paris: Albin Michel. See section 15).

26. Given that we cannot see behind ourselves, patterns are mainly embroidered on the back of clothes, in order to protect their wearer from misfortune (Kira von Deusen's communication at the third conference of the International Society for Shamanistic Research, held in Nara in 1995).

Yakuts also play all kinds of games during their great ritual, the *yh̲yah*. They celebrate horse-breeding, horses having been the emblem of Yakut identity since the tsars. The ritual takes place on the day of the summer solstice, once the mares have foaled (Ergis 1974: 153, 166). *Yh̲yah* comes from a root that applies to all forms of sharing and distribution of small foodstuffs. In the epics, it is the name given to those parties, both meat feasts and games festivals (Ergis 1947: 37–38), that aim at deciding between the suitors of the hero's betrothed, and that he must win—this recalls the Buryats' former Bride's Games, and their epics. During the ritual, it is not meat that is distributed but rather fermented mare's milk. Every youngster must play with all their energy, their future life depending on it: "They stage the struggle for life" (Hudiakov [1866] 1969: 149).[27]

Their games are modeled on wildlife species: the reindeer for wrestling and dancing,[28] the hare for the hopping race, any kind of wader for skipping (on one leg), or even the crow when they have to pick up a mouthful of dirt from the ground, hands behind their backs, while skipping. When, during the rounds, arms raise and fall, they become spread wings; likewise, stamping feet become ungulate hoofs, prancing hips geese flanks, and the spinning bodies spiraling wildfowl ready for courtship. In this way, imitation tries to be as realistic as possible, directly reflecting the return journey of the migratory birds, and the natural world's awakening. The choruses are marked by onomatopoeia and chirping sounds, which are also meant to be roars.[29] What is important is that the grass "be always green where we play *oonn'oo*," "that the folk muster their courage. Laughing and playing take place and joy and cheerfulness soar, glad shouts ring out [. . .]; the blazing summer has come" (Ergis 1916, I: 53).

27. Hudiakov was a young Russian revolutionary exiled to Verkhoyansk in 1867. He died without the chance to publish his ethnographic and linguistic works.

28. When they perform their small bouncing trot, "[the dancers] look like running reindeer" (Zhornickaya 1966: 28–39, 74–81). But there are also slower and more solemn dances. Often, women perform round dances while men wrestle. Then the men join the women, take them under their arms, and slowly turn clockwise, raising sometimes one leg, sometimes the other (Ergis 1974: 158).

29. What is remarkable is that neither songs nor dances mention horses, whereas the holiday celebrates horse breeding. At most the jaw harps, *h̲omus*, sometimes mimic the rhythm of galloping hoofs. Some of their sounds aim at enchanting game: they are named *h̲omuh̲un*: "charms, spells."

Imitation in Saami ritual play

In his article about the ritual game as the Saami used to perform it before the adoption of Christianity, Hakan Rydving (2010) notices the vocabulary's imitative character. The verb *gikhat,* which means for the wood grouse or the capercaillie to scream or to make noise during mating, applies to the ritual phase during which the shaman *noaidi* sways, jumps in the air, springs from left to right, and then collapses. This behavior was meant to express the *noaidi*'s alleged links with a female spirit, and the accompanying songs had an erotic aspect. Dubious as the sources may be, the author concludes, these movements most likely mimicked the mating games of some animal species.

Imitation and substitution in Koryak ritual play

These themes pervade Patrick Plattet's (2005) inquiry on the Koryaks of Kamchatka. The dance of the reindeer breeders of the inner peninsula mimics what makes "the reindeer happy," and proves their virile vitality, namely leaping and running. The women's dances in the marine mammal hunter societies living along the coastline contain not jumps but shoulder movements, since they mimic seals. The author highlights that the imitative intent is constantly claimed as a condition to obtain "luck." But imitation is complete only if one screams or sings like the model animal. Imitation is revitalizing on the sole condition of including the production of corresponding sounds, vocal effects being the necessary complement to body movements (ibid.: ch. 6).

Other forms, based on substitution, add to the ritual forms based on imitation. Hunters of the coastline build wooden seal substitutes, which will finally be "returned to the sea" (ibid.: 344), and reindeer breeders use all sorts of replacements, thus sparing the reindeer of their own herds: sausages and herbs to sacrifice them during rituals, twigs to make them compete during races (ibid.: ch. 7).

COMPARATIVE REMARKS

Beyond the easily explainable variations, such as the seal imitations for the seal hunters of Kamchatka, all these Games share similar (nonexclusive) core models: the same type of wildlife species, great cervids and wildfowl, in the two same types of behavior, both of which constitute together a prelude to

mating. They also all have in common the fact that they kept their place in the collective festive lifestyle after the Soviet regime stripped them of their shamanic elements. Whatever the field for which an "effect" is expected from them, they remain for the Siberian peoples a "duty" as much as a holiday, the fulfillment of which is mandatory for whoever wants to remain within his or her community, and see things improve. Nowadays, they still generate the expectation of an "effect." Of course, this "effect" differs from that which was formerly expected from the shamanic ritual. But what matters is the persistence of such an expectation across time and change: it seems that this is due to the fact that the Games are a fictional frame, in which the acts performed refer to "something else." In the past, the Games' motive and the expected "effect" corresponded to one another: renewal of nature, the return of game, the luck of the hunter. Today, they are dissociated: the expected "effect" is negatively defined—without the Games, things would be worse—whereas the declared motive is "harmony with nature," a vague wording, out of which emerges the idea of spurring renewal. But the real and more authentic reason is identity, as shown in the institutionalization of these Games as ethnic or national holidays. Throughout this evolution, the nature of the games has constantly changed: whereas dancing gradually disappeared, new games arrived—games without any link to the activities actually undertaken. Furthermore, their field has expanded from the domain of the body to these of technical skill and mental agility.

There was also, in the case of both the epic and the shamanic ritual, congruence between the motive and the "effect" expected from the performance (preparing the hunts), but both these forms have disappeared.

THE FICTIONAL FRAME: COMMON POINT BETWEEN PLAY AND RITUAL

Even though wrestling fights and dances may appear as regulated activities by contrast with the fiction the shamanic ritual creates, the distinction this chapter makes between imitation and simulation cannot be reduced to the following: "Thus games are not ruled and make-believe. Rather, they are ruled *or* make-believe" (Caillois [1958] 1961: 9). Indeed, there is always creation of fictions because there cannot be any play without the context indicating: "this is play." The regulated games themselves constitute the body of the fictional frame that

makes them games. There cannot be *game* without *play*, whereas we can *play* without playing *games.*[30]

The creation of a fictional frame is a shared feature of rite and play, and the fact that our main examples have the form of both game and rite increases the difficulty in establishing a distinction between the two. In particular, we could define wrestling and dances as "events [produced] by means of a structure," a characteristic feature of play according to Lévi-Strauss ([1962] 1966: 32), because they make up the Games as a structure, and moreover as a structure from which an "effect" upon reality is expected, namely as a rite. As for the shamanic ritual, it fits the Lévi-Straussian definition of rite, which, like the myth, "takes to pieces and reconstructs sets of events" (ibid.: 33); but one set of events it comprises, the skits the shaman mimes, does not have that feature of arousing expectations as rite would (see above, ch. 4). From here on, how can we oppose play and rite as such, as formed entities? As he wonders what separates play and rite, Köpping (1997) asks himself which one includes the other, when play occurs within a ritual, or when a ritual happens upon stage: Which of the two has a greater presence in the eyes of the participants, the embodied character or the person who embodies it? Also basing himself on Bateson's definition of play, Köpping deduces that play, by suspending reality, or by creating a fantasy reality, tears down the frames of conventional perception, and generates a "crisis of conscience." According to the author, this gives an inherently false and subversive aspect to play; by contrast, rite appears sacred and true, insofar as it fosters belief in its own value. But Köpping finally abandons this standpoint: being conscious that play is false would instill widespread cynicism in the players, and this does not happen.

The next part of my work will, among other things, fuel wider discussion about this distinction, which overlaps with several other questions posed by the theme of play: notably, that of the relation between the play-frame and the acts constituting this frame, that of the relation to reality, and finally that of our consciousness of play. These questions are asked in almost the exact same terms for rite, pushing the standpoint from which we must view this distinction always that little bit further.

30. Video game experts created the notion of *gameplay* to pinpoint what constitutes the recreational quality of video game software: for instance, it implies that rules are conceived in order to push the user toward a playful attitude, by the manner in which the system's mechanisms interact and evolve with the player (Genvo 2006a: 206).

THE MANY MERITS OF IMITATION

Claiming Plato and Aristotle's authority, some have boiled playing down to imitation. This chapter has merely rooted play in imitation. Mathematician Alan Turing made play the tool of imitation. The method that the inventor of computers developed and named the "imitation game" enabled him to consider a "universal machine" able to mimic, mime, and simulate the behavior of any other Turing machine (Dupuy [1994] 1999: 30–32). This allowed "play" to play a part when cognitive science originated: imitation enables one to internalize the benefits and drawbacks of the imitated behaviors, and to anticipate the effects they generate. Analysis of our example has shown that imitation and simulation are two ways of referring to realities without replicating them, two ways of building "small-scale models," a notion frequently applied to play, and which I will further investigate later. Analysis has also shown that other processes, such as the epic performance for the Buryats, or the fabrication of substitutes for the Koryaks, without necessarily being labeled as "play," could be attributed an analogous value of generating a preparatory "effect" on these realities from which they draw their inspiration, without copying them.

Let us now consider this preparatory "effect." Later on, I will tackle the cognitive dimension of "play" in our examples. For imitation implies cultural and mental choices which mean that play is never purely physical, and that it is always liable to have a series of consequences.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Foreshadowing
An indirect mode of preparation

> There, as you know [. . .], they have dancing and merrymaking: so here these two are merely dancing about you and performing their sportive gambols with a view to your subsequent initiation. You must now, accordingly, suppose you are listening to the first part of the professorial mysteries.
>
> – Plato, *Euthydemus*[1]

Based on imitative gestures, our Games were once clearly believed to be preparatory and endowed with an "effect" on upcoming reality. The movements imitated in wrestling and dancing themselves have a preparatory effect for animals: they are not actually combat or mating, but rather their preliminaries.[2] Having gathered from his etymological exploration that numerous "to play" verbs apply

1. I am grateful to Damien Simon for drawing my attention to this sentence he found in one of Plato's lesser-known texts.
2. Let us recall that the Buryat *naadaha* applies to the courtship displays of birds, *hatarha* to the skipping trot of the great cervid during the mating season, *mürgehe* to his head-butts; in Tungusic, *evi-* is used for the wood grouse's courtship display.

to fish spawning and to the courtship displays of birds, Huizinga concludes as follows:

> It is not the [sexual] act as such that the spirit of language tends to conceive as play; rather the road thereto, the preparation for and introduction to "love," which is often made courtship display by all sorts of playing. This is particularly true when one of the sexes has to rouse or win the other over to copulating [. . .] it would be erroneous to incorporate the sexual act itself, as love-play, in the play category. The biological process of pairing does not answer to the formal characteristics of play. ([1938] 1949: 43)

Numerous authors highlight the preparatory intent in the derived forms of the Latin root *ludo* (one of *ludus* many meanings was school, and of *lusus* lovemaking), and of ancient Greek *paidia* and *schola* (*schola* referred as much to leisure and spare time as to school).[3] However, it seems that the connotations of *jocus*, originally "play in words," lack this preliminary aspect. Bateson also deems playing preparatory: "The clenched fist of threat is different from the punch, but it refers to a possible future (but at present nonexistent) punch [. . .] a great part of what appears to be combat among members of a single species is rather to be regarded as threat" ([1972] 1987: 186–87). The preparatory role of play is a self-evident fact, largely made use of in teaching methods, and in all the practices aiming at "building the future," many of which are based on the use of objects such as dice and cards. It explains why many rites of passage or initiation take the form of a game: inasmuch as every beginning casts its shadow on what follows, the preparatory act is often mixed with practices aimed at making it foster and bear a predictive value. In itself, the notion of preparation, often referred to in terms of desire and will, evokes a sense of temporality with a view to the future. Notwithstanding, does it imply any continuity between playing destined to prepare an activity and this activity itself? Are the imitative gestures constitutive of the Games necessarily of the same kind as the activities they are said to prepare for? Could there exist a continuity between gestures and movements, even though there is, in principle, discontinuity between the fictional realm of the imitative play and the realm of reality for which it is said to prepare in ordinary life?

3. Inter alia, Benveniste (1947: 163).

Before I examine our examples through this lens, I must be allowed a short digression in order to specify the nature of preparation by playing—which we would better refer to as foreshadowing. Playing can lead to the fulfillment of the action it prepares for, but, more often than not, they differ in nature, both in the animal behaviors to which the etymologies of play refer, and in our examples. And indeed, training for the sake of training is not really playing; it is more of an optional corollary. This is demonstrated by a comment about the practice of soccer in Japanese schools: emphasizing ethics and effort over goal-scoring, this practice ends up being nothing more than a tool of moral training by the body (Hendry and Raveri 2002). This encourages me first to show how play, as a fictional frame, implies a difference in nature between the preparatory action and the action prepared for, before later trying to grasp how the suppression of this difference transforms play.

ON THE PROPER USE OF FICTION

The imitated movements in the Games, from which we draw our examples, perpetuate life in the animal kingdom, but wrestling and dancing do not, either concretely or directly, prepare humans for anything. In the course of their lives, young people will neither have to head-butt nor have to skip. But they will have to be ready to fight and procreate. Human imitation of these animal behaviors creates the fiction that enables one to imagine these outcomes. Fiction, Alfred Gell highlights, is unavoidable for learning what must be hidden, notably all that refers to love.[4] Concealment is necessary; even the animals, he says, "conceal their copulatory intentions" (Gell [1996] 2011: 3).

> [. . .] popular fiction proceeds and guides the actions of real-life lovers, rather than representing real life after the fact. Fiction is a giant simulation, an external thought-process, which provides individuals with the scripts they cannot do without and which non-fictional experience cannot supply. This means that we cannot put love-fiction to one side as if it were less authentic than real life. [. . .] Fiction, re-enacted as real life, produces the histories on which relationships and society at large are grounded. (Gell [1996] 2011: 8)

4. Dream and portrait are the two mandatory figures of love (Bansat-Boudon 1998).

Regarding this matter, it should be noted that similar mechanisms are at work in various common practices of numerous societies, ours included. These are practices which are not usually seen as play. The most conventional are those that aim at making children imagine an invisible world, and preparing them to control their reactions in relation to both the visible and invisible world. They are based on the creation of a fictional frame, and on some latitude regarding the attitude the frame suggests. They are, for instance, the stories we tell our young children before they go to sleep—stories which include fairies and monsters, witches and bogeymen. As soon as we are done telling them, we acknowledge that they are untruthful. *Hudlaa*! "This was not true, this was a lie [with the meaning that this was a joke]!" the Mongol narrator would then say with a mischievous grin: he did not want to lie to hide the truth, but to feed the imagination, in this case to imagine that in the forest you can unexpectedly encounter a wandering soul.[5] The enunciation of fiction and its subsequent denunciation as a lie also belong to the learning process. This is probably the mechanism behind a universal type of joke, by which one throws out a provocation, before ending with: "I was just joking!" (a Mongol would also say *hudlaa* in such a case).

Of course, learning about the existence of fictional realms counts for something in our ability to conceive characters and situations that we know do not exist, and to experience feelings for them. This ability is called upon not only when we watch movies or read novels, but also in other fields that we refer to with such expressions as "religious experience" or "passion for the game."

One more word about the Japanese schoolchildren: their practice of soccer, in its boiled-down form of training, dribbling, and passing, unifies the preparatory and prepared actions. In this regard, play only prepares itself; it becomes rational on the basis of measurable criteria in search of constant improvement. From this point, the difference in nature between playing and doing fades away; or, more precisely, the logic of doing slips into play, and training is thus perceived as demanding such an effort that it resembles work. This is one sign of the shift from game to sport; the latter comes with a whole bundle of classifications and qualifying rounds, medals and records.

5. In his analysis of ghost stories gathered from the Mongols, Delaplace (2008: 245–52) shows how the narrator structures his story basing himself on the doubt he faces concerning his encounter with the soul of a dead person. The repetition of his story by those to whom he told it ends up leading to a form of belief in the truthfulness of this encounter, which at first all denied.

THREE FICTIONAL FRAMES AND THREE TYPES OF PREPARATION

As for our examples, we can identify three fictional frames matching three types of preparations to which an "effect" upon the prepared action—of a separate nature—is attributed. The Bride's Games were once the prelude to the bride's wedding and her matrimonial life. Every young man had to know how to wrestle to keep his place in the marriage market. And young people participated in as many games as they could. Both warrants and witnesses of their "training" with a view to gaining full membership within their community, the elder members of the family watched over it, because their alert presence was a condition of the Games' validity for all involved.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the shamanic rituals of the Buryat people, who had become livestock breeders, no longer aimed at preparing for the hunting season. Nonetheless, their shamans still wore a crown of antlers, even though their pastoral life meant there was no reason to. Although hunting no longer represented their means of survival, they had kept their "hunter soul" by living off something else: livestock breeding and agriculture had replaced hunting in the economy, but not in the value system. Only the persistence of hunting ideology explains the presence, both in this ritual and in the Games it comprises, of formal elements typical of the shamanism of forest hunting peoples. In this mixed-economy context, the epic "prepared" the great hunts. Its constraints vouch for that: though it was forbidden to sing it during spring and summertime, it was a duty to sing it before and during the hunting season. Singing the epic without a reason for doing so meant risking the death of close ones. All Buryat folklorists note the bards' reluctance at having their songs recorded or even written down, and their tendency to bring their song to a halt at the merest hint of a threat of misfortune, even during the Soviet era (Ulanov 1960: 5a). The epic shares some features with the shamanic ritual it replaces[6] (it is sung with a shaman's voice, and like him tells of a quest for marriage), and differs from it in how it replaces gestural simulation with sung narration, thereby it is more intellectualized. The shamanic ritual prepares both at an institutional level—it ensures the hunt's legitimacy through a "wedding" with the spirit of a game-species—and at a practical level: "married," the shaman is allowed to seize the "luck" that determines a good hunting season.

6. Except that the shamanic ritual takes place in the spring, and the epic in the fall.

The epic seems to limit itself to a legitimizing role: it enables the hunters to comply with, or rather stops them from violating, the law. I never found any evidence of "luck" gained thanks to the epic; its "effect" relates rather to avoiding misfortune.

The same principles underlie these three types of preparation. All three of them display a single two-faced ideal in the form of different small-scale models: *legitimacy for* and *ability for defense and reproduction*. Be it by stylized and elaborate gestures, by mimes, or by narrative songs, preparation is a form of staging at the level of the individual—son-in-law, shaman, hero—bearing a collective importance as a *duty*: duty dictates that everybody comply in order to defend himself, and marrying is at the same time a duty for everybody to overpower the peer in order to wed the other. But from the stylized gesture to the mime, and from the mime to the song, the gap has widened from the original model, that is, preludes to animal mating.

Unlike the Games, which stick to these preliminaries, the shamanic ritual and the epic push them toward union: union between human and animal in the ritual, and between humans in the epic song. The evolution of the forms outlines a certain humanization of references.

RECENT RECONFIGURATIONS AND PREPARATION AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

During the twentieth century, the former Games disappeared, with the reconfiguration of new Games under the name of *Surharbaan* at the beginning of the Soviet era, and then reappeared under the name of *Naadan* at the end of this era. In November 1990, following its declaration of sovereignty, the Buryat Republic launched a campaign to make the epic hero Geser its cultural emblem.[7] Geser and his epic, the most famous in Buryat

7. Geser is a corruption of Roman Cæsar, from which Kaiser and Tsar are also derived. The promotional campaign of this hero came to an end during the second half of the 1990s. The Buryat Republic, predominantly Russian, relied on its Buryat minority to claim its independence, at least culturally. In 2002, it was forced to repeal the sovereignty it had declared in 1990 (Gazier 2007: n. 10). Constructions and publications linked to this hero and his epic have remained over time, but by the beginning of the twenty-first century, public events dedicated to them seemed to have disappeared (Hamayon 2000, 2004a, 2004b).

tradition, had been forbidden during the prewar purges (then rehabilitated in 1953), because of their supposedly "nationalist" content. The campaign launched in 1990 intended to organize, in the home villages of the most famous bards, "Geser's Games" (*Geserei Naadan*), with wrestling, archery contests, and horseracing. In all respects, this was an innovation. Whereas Geser was once absent from the shamanic rituals, and the epic only spoke of the Bride's Games, and was sung at night during winter, it was decided that these brand-new Geser's Games were to be held during the daytime in spring or summer. Little more than a decade later, the term *naadan* reappears in the name of the Three Manly Games (*Eryn Gurban Naadan*, directly inspired by the Mongolian national holiday), given to a celebration organized by the Buddhist monastery of Ivolga, located near the capital city, Ulan-Ude.[8] Stefan Krist, who attended the 2004 celebration,[9] noticed that the prizes awarded to the winners of the contests were worth twice as much as those awarded by the state during the national *Surharbaan*. Moreover, nowadays, the national *Surharbaan* has undergone a mix of Western modernization and retraditionalization. New games[10] have appeared, but the favorite sport, wrestling, has not disappeared (it mostly thrives in local and rural *Surharbaan*). Women are allowed to compete,[11] notably in archery. The *Surharbaan* also hosts beauty pageants, and fashion, cooking, singing, and dancing contests. Whereas during most of the twentieth century it was entirely financed by the participants, many sponsors now look upon it with greedy eyes, and some of them try to compete in influence with the state, political parties, the Buddhist Church, and private companies.

8. This monastery was built under Stalin in 1946, both to placate the population after the purges and the war, and to demonstrate the existence of freedom of religion in the USSR (Zhukovskaia 2005: 325).

9. Krist (2006: 139), but on p. 137 the author gives the date as 2003, saying that the *Naadan* could not take place the following year. He saw women in national costumes dancing the round *ieeher~ioohor* at length.

10. Notably volleyball, soccer, and *sambo*, the abbreviation for *samozashchita bez oruzhiei* (self-defense without weapons) (ibid.: 133).

11. In December 2003, there were 570 women wrestlers and 7411 wrestlers overall (ibid.: 134). In Mongolia, an attempt in 1940 to extend wrestling to women was not taken up: they were still excluded and could not touch the wrestlers at the risk of bringing them bad luck. Symmetrically, each wrestler must refrain from approaching his wife before the tournament (Lacaze 1999–2000: 89, 105, 101).

The preparatory aspect of the Mongol Naadam

The recent history of Games in Buryatia (*Surharbaan*, Geser's Games, *Naadan* in the Ivolga monastery) can shed light upon the debates surrounding the origin of the Mongol Three Manly Games,[12] often ascribed to the Mongol Empire's military activity in medieval times. We know that, thereafter, the Mongol aristocracy, vassals of the Qing dynasty, who ruled China from 1644 to 1911, competed with the Buddhist Church to organize them (Lacaze 1999–2000: 78–79). At all times, these Games have been played at the beginning of summer, around ritual cairns, *oboo~ovoo*, with the object of calling for prosperity (Niambuu 1976: 60f.).

Upon the establishment of the People's Republic of Mongolia in 1924, the Games became the national holiday. And in 1990s Mongolia, the idea that there are no happy years without *Naadam* remained widespread (Lacaze 1999–2000: 75). Their positive "effect" is magnified twofold during the Lunar New Year by the rebroadcasting of fights on television, deemed as important for general welfare as the live ones filmed outdoors during the preceding summer. The Mongolian press encourages general enthusiasm for the national *Naadam*, and make predictions as it unfolds: the words *saihan naadaarai* ("play well!") are exchanged, the past year is reviewed and reassessed, and strength is drawn for the year to come in relation to how well one has "played" during this *Naadam* (Legrain 2011: 289). This renewal is also put to political use : the authorities in power seize its image to reinforce their legitimacy (Lacaze 2006: 92).

The *Naadam*'s preparatory aspect for the social and political order is widely acknowledged. It is also apparent in the increasing importance of horseracing, introduced when the Mongols converted to Buddhism at the end of the sixteenth century, basically around the same time that dances started to disappear. In some areas, horse races were a rite of passage for child riders. Nowadays, in Inner Mongolia (China), the horse is still led to the race by the elder brother or the rider's father; children ride bareback, and the first to cross the finish line receives a saddle. Mainly—to skip ahead a few chapters—the races are a concrete representation of the centralizing ranking process which makes the Three Manly Games the nation's emblematic holiday, yet another reason for their political use.

12. This is true, despite the political difference in status between the Buryats, a national minority of Russia, and the Mongols, heirs of an empire and citizens of a formally independent state.

Everything (or almost everything) can be an opportunity to play in private; every informal game can "prepare"

Like many other peoples, the Buryats once linked the vitality of the living with how they took care of their dead: they "played" during funerals.[13] These no longer number among the opportunities to play in private. Today, the top opportunities are the "first times," such as birth, or a child's first haircut, and, furthermore, for the nomadic Mongol herders, the assembly of a new yurt, the choice of a new encampment, or the mares' first milking of the year.[14] On these occasions, play is informal. In a yurt, if a friendly visit lasts, the persons involved are liable to sing and play: jacks, cards, "bringing the fingers out."[15] These games do not aim at imitation, but, like wrestling, they have a form of internal sanction allowing the player to be classified, or his game to be assessed: he will have played better than the other player, or will have achieved "success" in his game (obtained a positive result). This internal sanction provides a measure of the expected "effect" that appears as an external sanction.

Vocal performances are contests that abide by an order and clearly defined rules (we can neither enter nor leave the yurt during the opening and closing songs). They must be closed with a feast. The reserves of boiled sheep meat and fermented mare's milk are essential: participants will have to eat their fill in order to confirm the abundance promised by the songs; and whoever infringes, even slightly, the rules will be compelled to drink down a big bowl of fermented milk in one go. The contest opens with the typical tune of the Three Manly Games. Like them, this song exalts common values and favors all that is of interest to the participants (personal material and Lacaze 1999–2000). Jousts and songs between the husband's and the bride's parties always enliven the wedding ceremonies. Everyone alters the rhythm in order to trip the others up (Rodica Pop, oral communication 2011).

What roots the use of play in augural situations is the expected propitiatory "effect." Mongol nomads play for the year to be good to them, for the cattle to thrive, for the hunt to be fruitful, and the yurt to be solid, and for unhappiness

13. This goes for ancient Rome and medieval France. Also see above, chapter 2.

14. All of these "first times" are subject to anointments and blessings.

15. This is the same as Morra, "a hand game that dates back thousands of years to ancient Roman and Greek times. Each player simultaneously reveals their hand, extending any number of fingers, and calls out a number. Any player who successfully guesses the total number of fingers revealed by all players combined scores a point" (Wikpedia, "Morra").

to cease, and happiness to return. Playing well, like singing well, or eating or drinking well, is necessary to the good order of the natural environment, and benefits the nomads and their herds (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991). As soon as the communist regime collapsed, pairs of dice players could be seen sitting on the steps of the underpass in front of the State Department Store of Ulaanbaatar: decades of interdiction had not altered the Mongols' taste for games, bets, and all that can "make the future."

The double notion of sanction: Shooting straight

The concept of preparation highlights the fact that the notion of sanction occurs at a dual level: internal sanction, tossed out of the play-frame, actually becomes a somewhat external sanction, with a propitiatory effect upon reality. The example of shooting illustrates this dual-sided aspect even more fully, since it is not part of the base movements of our "play": archery has long been part of the Games; shooting jacks is a recent addition. Jacks have long been played in private only.[16] In contemporary Mongolia, the anklebones of animals slaughtered for meat are still scraped and stored: owning a hundred of them guarantees their children's health, and several hundred guarantees their wealth. Children train for jacks during weddings (Kabzinska-Stawarz 1991: 17–28). For a long time, shooting jacks was recommended on New Year's Eve and during the cold season, when there were no Games, yet conversely they were forbidden during good weather when the Games returned.[17] Based on manual dexterity and performed indoors, and not on physical skills flaunted outdoors, they appeared as the "inverted replica" of the *Naadam* Games (ibid.). Shooting jacks was informally incorporated into the Three Manly Games at the time of Mongolia's autonomy (1911–21) to replace archery, the latter being seen as slightly too warlike in the eyes of the Buddhist Church and the Qing dynasty.

There is a real form of continuity between these two types of shooting: the verb for "shooting" is the same, *harvah* (*harbaha* in Buryat), and anklebones

16. Its name is *shagai harvah,* anklebone shooting; it is, insofar as it is a game, *togloom* and not *naadam*.

17. On New Year's, an alternate version of this shooting, on ice, was sometimes performed (it is mentioned, during the thirteenth century, in *The secret history of the Mongols*); it was thought of as a hunting expedition amongst allies (Tatár 1972; Lacaze 1999).

are assimilated to arrows. However, as time went by, their respective statuses diverged. Slowly, archery became obsolete. In the 1920s, women were allowed to shoot bows; a feminization, or at least a loss of virility, followed, and archery was perceived as the negative facet of wrestling (Lacaze 1999–2000: 76, 108, 113). It is significant that communist Mongolia disallowed shooting jacks for women during the national holiday. It acquired the status of *naadam* in 1998; and was hosted in Ulaanbaatar stadium during the *Naadam* national holiday in 2006 (ibid.; 2010: 3), but Laurent Legrain saw jacks being played outside the stadium in 2008. In a nomadic environment, even though the aim of jacks is the mere pleasure of spending time with friends and neighbors, its result is never incidental: winning (obtaining a favorable configuration) is a good omen, but losing is not really a bad sign. How come? Besides the player's partner and neighbor, could there be an invisible witness, an immaterial force, from which victory originates? Kabzinska-Stawarz's (1991) book gives a clear answer: the local spirits. These spirits are supposed to grant wealth to the winner. Playing always provides an opportunity to obtain a little of this ever-elusive good called "luck." This is what the nomad seeks when he throws his jacks, alone or with a partner, sitting in the grass in the steppe, just before he assembles his yurt. In all cases—once again, how can we differentiate play and ritual?—he will say that he has "shot jacks," and, if he achieves a winning configuration, that he has increased his "luck," without depriving his friends and family. His success does not make any losers.

But archery contests are confined to the *Naadam*. And within this frame, as much as it can be depreciated, archery retains its own inherent value. When they reach the target, the participants throw their arms in the air and cry out repeatedly: *uuhai*![18] The latter is sung to a specific and prolonged melody, which recalls, according to Laurent Legrain (2011: 285), the "long song" of the Mongols. The national *Naadam* contest is nowadays the only opportunity to cry out *uuhai*, and one of the two sole opportunities, along with weddings, to sing long

18. The Mongols usually assimilate this exclamation, often translated by "hurray!," to that of *hurai*, typical of the ritual summoning happiness, *dallaga*. *Hurai* comes with a circular movement of the forearm that "calls to oneself" (*dallah* in Mongol, *dallaha* in Buryat), once directed at migratory birds, or at the soul suspected to have left the body during sleep. Both the exclamation and the movement (performed with an arrow decorated with ribbons, the tip of which has been dipped in milk) characterize the Buddhist inspiration rite "summoning happiness" (Hamayon 1990a: 315, 717). Regarding archery during the *Naadam*, see Lacaze (1999–2000: 110).

songs.[19] But in 2008, Legrain notes (ibid.: 289–90), the official commentary exalts long songs without saying much about archery, whereas the Games begin with the shooting of an arrow and the President of the Republic's tribute to the archers, thus expressing the will that the politics of the nation "aim straight," that they be *mergen*, the hunter's ideal attribute.

THE HUNTER'S IDEAL

> So spoke the Suitors. But Clever Odysseus, when he had picked up the great bow and looked it all over, as when an expert in the lyre and song easily stretches the string over the new peg, holding from both sides the well-twisted sheep gut, so without haste Odysseus strung the great bow. Then, holding it in his right hand, he tested the bowstring; it sang back a lovely note, like the song of a swallow.
>
> – *Odyssey*, translation by W. S. Anderson

This term, *mergen*, applies to the shooter who aims straight, and, by extension, to the wise man and the soothsayer. It refers to a global quality, both internal to the person and conspicuous at the same time, expressing harmony between the person and the completed act (Legrain 2011: 288–304). Combining manual skills on which the art of war is based, and the power of the voice on which social comfort is based (ibid.: 280 n. 41), the quality of *mergen* accounts for the common comparison between the archer and the singer: an archer is printed on the cover of many song books. More importantly, shooting is the only one of the Three Manly Games in which the contender must also be a singer. The archer, like the singer of the long song, is believed to possess the "nine manly knowledges," the nine *erdem*, a term derived from *er*, "male," like *virtus* is derived from Latin *vir*. This statement of virility matches the "loss of virility" caused by

19. Except, of course, performances in concert halls. The Mongol long song was registered on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2008.

the accession of women to archery contests.[20] According to Legrain, while the loss of virility is an element of archery's obsolescence, it cannot fully explain the discipline's neglect. Yet women have never been allowed to perform long songs during the Games, even though they have long sung them outside the Games. As for the assimilation of singers to archers, does this mean that one must, in the art of singing as in the art of hunting or waging war, "aim straight," that there is, somehow, a "target that must be reached"? Or must we consider, like musicologist André Schaeffner, that their assimilation is based on common physical traits?

> Like his sibling, the war or hunting tool, the musical bow consists of a flexible wooden shaft and of a rope tied at both tips. [. . .] It therefore is a string instrument, the simplest of all. In the ethnological field, the idea that the musical bow antedates the war weapon is widely accepted: the arrow could at first have had an existence of its own and only then have been used with the bow. Moreover, it is significant that various myths about the creation of the musical bow make no reference at all to hunting or war, but refer to the voice of spirits, which would manifest itself through this instrument [. . .] the string is struck thanks to a small stick or directly played with the fingers: the vibration would be almost imperceptible if it did not spread to a sound box—of which the mouth is the first example. (Schaeffner [1968] 1980: 155)

This hypothesis finds significant support in the Mongolian language, which, like French, uses the same word, *sur* (Buryat *hur*), to talk about vocal cords and the string of the bow. Furthermore, it gives some coherence to the continuity between the gestures and sounds we observe here. The gestures and sounds in question call upon an analogous principle of movement—rhythmic, vibratory, wave-like, in any case periodic—the presence of which in a gesture or a sound is enough to confront it with other gestures and other sounds, and thus constitutes a "distinctive mark," such as that which discriminates between dancing and walking, or singing and talking. This hypothesis' other advantage is that the idea of discontinuity between song and instrumental music becomes pointless,

20. This idea, typical of pastoral ideology, coexists in the Mongols' minds with the opposite idea, that at the time the hunting lifestyle was prevalent, women, due to the fact that, like men, they belong to the human species, had analogous abilities to the species hunted. One of the hero Geser's spouses is called Alma Mergen.

while at the same time explaining why play applies to the latter, but not to the former. Throughout his book, Schaeffner refuses the "dualism of the voice and the instrument," rejecting an "unreasonably vocal conception of music" just as much as a "manual origin of the instrument."[21] However, using an instrument is part of "play"—it is both acoustic and gestural—whereas singing, being acoustic only, is not. For his part, Huizinga had noticed that "the term 'playing' is never applied to singing, and applies to music-making only in certain languages;[22] it seems probable that the connecting link between play and instrumental skill is to be sought in the nimble and orderly movements of the fingers" ([1938] 1949: 42).

In other words, rhythmic or not, song is excluded from the sphere of play in Mongol and Buryat, whereas instrumental music, insofar as it is gestural, and likewise archery, insofar as it claims to also be sound, belong to it: therefore, being rooted in the principle of periodic movement is not sufficient for something to belong to play. The division of this principle explains the association of sound and voice to wind and rivers (Legrain 2011: 363); however, periodic movement must express itself simultaneously in physical and sound form to explain why wind and running water can be said to "play" (one makes the air hiss and the grass wave, the other whispers and ripples the water's surface), but not songs.[23]

Be that as it may, the assimilation of archers and singers draws attention to a theme in the background of some of the dimensions of play and seems to have something to do with their linking. This theme rests on the fact that to play *well*, physical capacities are not enough. One must be "skillful" (*mergen*) to reach the target upon shooting, or master "the art of holds" (*mehe*) to bring the opposing wrestler to the ground. Yet the shooter's (*mergen*) dexterity spreads to that of the wise man and the soothsayer, passing from the physical to the mental aspect; but what ensures a series of victorious holds in the fights, the strategic capacity or cunning (*mehe*), claims the contrary: a passing from the mental to the physical

21. Boissière (2011). The assimilation between hunting bow and chordophone or string instrument also exists in Tibet (Stein 1959: 379).

22. Thus, to play the violin is *tocar* (touch) *al violín* in Spanish, *canta* (sing) *la vioara* in Romanian.

23. In order to explain the use of play to say "embroider" in Yakut and Tungusic (see above, ch. 7), perhaps we must call upon the notion of periodic movement: the rhythm of the stitches distinguishes this type of embroidery from simple sewing. For the Mongols, play does not apply to the realization of ornamental designs, such as the "endless knot," considered a lucky charm both for the individual and for his family.

aspect. Let us outline this theme now, before furthering our research in the following chapters. It stems from the relations between movement and sound.

GESTURES AND SOUNDS, AND FROM GESTURE TO SOUND

> "Play" is a very fine word, for to play an instrument is to be one with it. To not play *with* the instrument is to not play at all.[24]
>
> – Robert Schumann

These back and forths between singing and shooting, between vocal form and gestural form, are a new opportunity to investigate the relations between movements and sounds. In archery and in shamanic rituals, they are associated, but in different ways. If the archer must also be a singer (in both cases, cords vibrate), it is not he who sings while he shoots, and his bow does nothing more than shoot, and his movements are limited to shooting. He sings and raises his arms when the other archers shoot. There is no simultaneous production of sounds and gestures by the shooting archer.

By contrast, let us recall the shamanic ritual. The shaman beats his drum *at the same time* as he "stamps," "skips," or "head-butts." His beating accompanies his gestures, like cries accompanying animal movements. He does not use his drum like a beating instrument, but like a being: it is an imaginary being he must "make present" by beating his drum—a being that the drum's "animation ritual" will have called up beforehand (see below). In order to beat it, the shaman holds his drum almost vertically, with the open face (as opposed to the membrane) against his torso, and his drumstick at the level of his lower abdomen. He strikes the membrane, from the outside, from bottom to top. The observers' prudishness is not the only explanation for the concealment of this unambiguous evocation of the shaman's marital project: neither he nor anybody else may talk about his spirit "wife," at the risk of making her flee, and of jeopardizing all relations with the species she represents. This body language transforms the drumstick into a prolongation of the shaman's body, and grants the beating of

24. "Das Wort 'spielen' ist sehr schön, da das Spielen eines Instrumentes eins mit ihm sein muß. Wer nicht *mit* dem Instrument spielt, spielt es nicht."

the drum a biological role. Moreover, throughout the Siberian forest, the drumstick is the shaman's first ritual accessory.

The shaman also uses his drumstick in an instrumental fashion, for divination, for instance (see below, ch. 12). Likewise, his drum has many uses, some of which are more representational (the drum can be his animal alter ego)[25] and others more instrumental (e.g., that of a mount for transportation, or a container for material or immaterial objects).[26]

As for the dissociation between gesture and sound, and more importantly the shift from gesture to sound, it is the sign of an intellectualization of action. This drives one to decipher the differences between the two "play" verbs in Mongolian. At first, there is an opposition between physical and mental aspects: *naadah* (Buryat *naadaha*) encompasses all that falls under performance, whereas *togloh* (*togloho,* seldom used in Buryat) extends to skill, reflection, and calculus games. But these verbs also conflict because of their animal uses: *naadah* is used for wild animals, *togloh* for domestic animals. In this way, a distinction between physical and mental play appears as a reflection of the distinction between wild and domestic.

WHAT IS THE BASIS OF THE PREPARATORY "EFFECT" ATTRIBUTED TO NONPLAY FORMS?

We ask this question regarding the two main sung forms I have just evoked. The Mongol long song can be defined by its unmeasured melody, enlivened by elongated singing exercises, which make the lyrics almost unintelligible. The Buryat epic is a narrative song that unfolds to the rhythm of alliterative verses, and even syllables, the lyrics of which must be understood. Even though neither

25. Covered by the taut skin of a male cervid, the drum is sometimes seen as the shaman's "animal double" (if the skin rips, the shaman risks death), sometimes as an animal to be tamed. For the Turks of the Altai, even though it is always made of wild animal skin, it can also be ridden, a specific case of its purpose as a means of communication between the worlds. The interpretation of the drum as a "mount" is deceptive: even if it is ridden, the resonators are still called "horns or antlers." It is significant that one must refrain from "animating" a drum stretched with a horse's skin (N. A. Alekseev 1984: 158; Hamayon 1990a: 486–90).

26. Made with a high frame and a membrane stretched across one side only, the drum forms an ovoid receptacle. It is the place where the shaman's helping spirits gather. For the Tungusic people, it can also represent a small boat driving a dead person's soul, or a shelter to protect the souls of the living against external threats.

of these forms belongs to the sphere of "play," they influence reality in a similar way to the gestural forms of which they are functional equivalents: archery and the shamanic ritual. But there is one condition to this influence: they must be performed by men, because women are not allowed to sing long songs during the Mongolian *Naadam*; they may sing only in private, or in other types of celebrations and shows. They are not allowed to "shamanize" the Buryat epic either; they must recount it in prose with a speaking voice, and their tales have no "effect."[27] Therefore, we can assert that there is a male monopoly on sound forms, whereas gestural forms only accorded men a privilege.

Vocal sounds have a preparatory "effect" only if they differ from those of the usual voice. The epic "prepares" only because the bard "shamanizes" his singing. It is by virtue of not being an ordinary voice that the shout may have a "power," like in the examples Legrain (2011) analyzes, and become an "agent," according to Alfred Gell's meaning.[28] With regard to sounds and gestures, a certain periodicity of movement (rhythm, vibration) is a distinctive "mark" of what is endowed with an "effect" outside the framework considered, and one of this effect's conditions.

Altogether, what remains beyond the formal changes I have just depicted—considering both changes in the Games' composition, and changes that give birth to other types of public events—is the expectation of an "effect" upon reality, and an effect deliberately undefined. (I will explore this compulsory indeterminacy below, in ch. 13). This can explain why the tendency to "confront each other," regularly noted among the peoples of the region in question, does not translate into the quest for continual self-improvement, as it does for athletes. And this can also explain the obsolescence of some practices, such as archery: the latter seems far too closely linked with an outdated and precise type of activity to give rise to the expectation of an undefined "effect." The preparatory aspect must be defined at a more abstract level.

27. Hangalov (1959, II: 320). The epic loses its function as it becomes a tale, Barannikova writes (1978: 14).

28. "An agent is one who 'causes events to happen' in their vicinity. [. . .] Whereas chains of physical /material cause-and-effect consist of 'happenings' which can be explained by physical laws which ultimately govern the universe as a whole, agents initiate 'actions' which are 'caused' by themselves, by their intentions not by the physical laws of the cosmos. An agent is the source, the origin, of causal events, independently of the state of the physical universe" (Gell 1998: 16). Hence, it is a subjective definition: the agent is an agent only as long as the subject considers him a "cause," and believes he has "intentions."

"SMALL-SCALE MODEL"

This expression often appears in Monique Clavel-Lévêque's book to define the Roman Circus Games: from this perspective, they are a "tool for knowledge," enabling one to "understand and dominate the world" (1984: 84). Many works on our theme use small-scale models widely, along with presentations of board games and building games. Cognitive science and cybernetics have made them operative concepts (Dupuy [1994] 1999). The meaning of model varies between two poles: that of representation, and that of the perfect example, the norm to which one has to refer. I have referred to the animal species imitated during the Games as "models," highlighting the fact that wrestling and dancing drew their inspiration from these behaviors without aiming at copying them. At times, I have used the expression "small-scale models" to define the Games as a frame. It is time to underline the fact that models "model," namely, that they provide a simplified representation of something more complex, an interpretative representation too, which sets the action in a fictional frame to better select what is relevant and set aside what is superfluous. The modeled representation is not a small-sized copy.[29] As a simplified and specific interpretation, a small-scale model sets a norm, and makes it easy to understand and remember all at the same time.

The preparatory aspect of the Games encourages me to make use of this notion. Provided that these Games are said to prefigure an action and lead the actors to it, they are "small-scale models" of the prepared action, of which they represent the more crucial aspects. This explains the obligation for members of a community to participate in its Games.[30] To ponder the small-scale model represented by the Games is to ponder the cognitive categories that play instills.

29. Models or miniatures are only specific applications of the notion of "small-scale models." The meaning set out here implies that the "small-scale model" of the Games refers to something other than the acts that make up the Games, and that it is not a miniature copy of the reality it models.

30. Nowadays still, in Tibet, whoever refuses to "play" is fined (Katia Buffetrille, oral communication). This is far removed from Huizinga's ([1938] 1949) play as a "free activity," or from Caillois' conception of play as a "free and gratuitous" activity ([1958] 1961), which reflect the common understanding of play as "to occupy oneself in (a sport or diversion); amuse oneself in (a game)," the first meaning given in the *Collins dictionary*.

CHAPTER NINE

The cognitive process
Identity and alterity, opposition and complementarity

> There is no subject, either individual or collective, without taking a step back in order to see oneself, and be seen or talked about as if one were another, seen or talked about by others.[1]
>
> – Alain Caillé, *Anthropology of the gift*

The fact that participation in the Games, which "prepare" things for which success is important—the hunting season or the year to come—is a membership condition of a community, as well as a duty of said membership, gives these Games an essential role in internalizing its fundamental cognitive categories. This illustrates the cognitive function that play fulfills by virtue of its being a creating process in a fictional frame. This chapter aims at exposing these categories; they make up the small-scale model the Games impose upon the participants; and they lay the foundation for how the person and the group are structured, mostly in the construction of their identity, in their relation to alterity, and in their engagement with the world.

1. "Il n'y a pas de sujet, individuel ou collectif, sans mise à distance permettant de se voir et d'être vu, dit ou raconté comme si on était un autre, vu, dit ou raconté par des autres." 2000. "Brief remarks about fair-play."

THE NOTION OF COMMUNITY: PHYSICAL REPRODUCTION, SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

The Games' structure enables some, and only some, individuals to participate, making them members of the same community, as distinct from other homologous communities. In this way, it builds the community as an exclusive social group, defined both as different from the others, and as human by opposition to the wild animal species from which the formal aspects of the Games draw their inspiration. It thus traces a double boundary around this group. Within the group, the structure of the Games defines categories by distributing roles which are both rights and duties. Only the young "play," though they do not take the initiative; rather they must obey the group's law, and abide by the elder members' watchfulness, the latter controlling their respect for the law. Among young people, only men practice both types of games. Wrestling is all male, and opposes similar but rival individuals for purposes of selection, whereas dancing is mixed, and draws different but complementary individuals closer together for the sake of union and cooperation.

Wrestling is a series of single oppositions, and the round dance a combination of relations of complementarity.[2] Thus, there is an obvious disproportion in the relative extent of their bodily experiences, all the more significant when one considers that, within the frame of the Games, one does not exist without the other. For the animal models, a causal relationship is clearly established between opposition and union, because it is the vigor the male invests in order to repel his rival that attracts the female, an optimal reproduction factor from a Darwinian perspective.[3] With regard to their association, explicitly inspired by animals, there is nothing paradoxical. The Siberian Games intentionally call upon principles of opposition and complementarity *together and in interdependent fashion*

2. This distinction agrees with Bateson's about reciprocal and complementary types of relations.

3. However, for certain species, competition between males happens in and for itself, disregarding the stake which the female embodies: this is well known among racehorses, for instance. Pigeons do the same, according to a study by psychologists from the University of Kentucky: trained to obtain food by activating switches with their beaks, pigeons had the choice: they could make a horizontal line appear, thereby winning three food rations; or they could make a vertical line appear, winning ten rations if it was red (20 percent probability), or nothing otherwise (80 percent probability); they favored this risky choice over the insurance of a minimal gain (Zentall and Stanger 2011).

in order to instill them, *along with the bond that links them together*, in each and all of the players. The Games ensure the survival of the group as such through the interdependence of both these principles, and of both the individual and the group level. For it is the group that matters, as Maurice Godelier points out.

> It is not their "species" that individuals strive to reproduce; for the Baruya, it is the social group to which they belong, the social relationships within which each new person engendered will take his or her place. When Sigmund Freud declared that the characteristically aggressive behavior of the male, and thus of men, served to ensure the reproduction of our species because it made it possible to overcome female passivity and resistance, he was advancing a biological and ideological view of sexuality, something that does not seem to be the goal human beings are pursuing when they reproduce. (Godelier [2007] 2009: 122)

However, if our Games truly aim at the group's social reproduction, they just as fundamentally aim at its physical reproduction, and, jointly, that of the animal species off which it lives. This biological aspect is especially notable in the Even population: they count the deaths and births that have occurred within the group since the previous Games (A. A. Alekseev 1993: 49). Generally speaking, in Siberia, all celebrations containing these two types of physical games have the joint value of global renewal and identity claim, and all celebrations bearing these values are based on physical games. This amounts to instilling inside the body the world order, and the place everyone holds within it.

The very frequent association of wrestling and dancing games

Such an association between wrestling-type games and dancing-type games is widespread across the world, without excluding other types of games. At times attributed to an animal model, it is almost always linked to the rhythm of the seasons.

This association is often present in the vocabulary itself. In this way, for the Kham Magar of Nepal, the verb *kopshine* means, simultaneously: wrestling or fighting, dancing, playing, and engaging in sexual intercourse; threatening and comic gestures mingle in the shamanic rites (Sales 1991: 115–25). For the Indians of the Surat, the verb *khelna* means dancing or jumping, and thumping one's chest with weapons, or even piercing one's cheek or tongue with a dagger (Van der Veer 1992). The Inuit holiday of the *Tivajuut* combines games of strength

between men divided into two camps, and the ritual exchange of spouses (Saladin d'Anglure 1989). In Tahiti, the closing party of the ritual year and of the abundant season is mainly made up of combat games and dances (Babadzan 1993: 240–41). Frazer notices the ubiquity of warlike games in fertility rituals, which include, incidentally, behaviors recalling Buryat styles of dancing; this goes for Saint George's cherished skipping and for the type of stamping that consists in striking the ground to fertilize it (Frazer 1890, III: 77–84). In Tibet, even the sacred mountains are supposed to associate these two kinds of relations. Some legends tell of the marriage of two mountains, or of a mountain and a river; others, of two mountains fighting (Stein 1959: 469).

These examples give an idea of the frequency of this association and of some of the gestures throughout the world.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF AS AN INDIVIDUAL SUBJECT BY THE EXPERIENCE OF ALTERITY

Each type of game shows a different facet of the identity and alterity relation between players, which always define the self and the other, be he or she an opponent or a partner. In wrestling, the other player is of the same sex, but must be of another line.[4] In dance, the dancers, placed side by side, differ both in line and in sex.[5] Combined, these two games present—for men alone—two ways of perceiving oneself via two ways of perceiving the other.

Playing as an experience of alterity has seen its role in structuring the subject widely acknowledged in child psychology research; and repetition of such an experience ensures cognition and recollection (Gebauer and Wulf 1997: 46).

4. In the Mongol and Buryat traditions, it is impossible— in principle—to wrestle, even for training purposes, with a brother or a blood relative, and training is encouraged between potential brothers-in-law. During the wedding ceremony, dual games oppose the husband's camp to the wife's. In the Mongol *Naadam*, wrestlers are divided into two camps, East and West, like in weddings; therefore, we can wonder, as Gaëlle Lacaze notes (1999–2000: 83–84), whether this is not a representation of combat between allied groups.

5. In principle, rounds were danced by the unmarried, but during the Soviet era, ages, genders, and lines were all mixed. Their rules softened at the same time as marriage alliance rules did. This probably contributed to their loss of identity value, especially at a national level.

Winnicott makes this point about the example of the baby who touches his toes, and sucks on his thumb or a piece of cloth, or, later, a teddy bear.

These are all "transitional objects," which Winnicott (1971: 27) identifies as "not me." To this author, the process of *playing* itself as a mental activity is what enables the child to make up a rule and initiate a relation to the world, because the subject assigns to the object a place outside of his control area, and perceives it as external (ibid.: 8, 48, 168).

The idea that identity is constructed by the experience of alterity accounts for other aspects that play takes in our examples. We can now see wrestling as a more complex practice than a simple confrontation with the other; winning is as much demonstrating one's own strength as beating the opponent. This concurs with what virtual game creators write in the periodical *Ludologia*: to them, the player's *empowerment* relies upon the game's cognitive dimension. The simple fact of playing somehow gives the player a consciousness of himself as opposed to what he is not, a consciousness of becoming the agent of a relationship.

But that is not all. Transitional objects and transitional phenomena belong to the realm of illusion, which, Winnicott adds (ibid.), is at the basis of the initiation of experience. This leads him to write that all the experiential existence of mankind is built on a game basis, and also that the feeling of loss can become a means of incorporating one's experience of oneself.

More importantly, the specific feature of play is that it creates a transitional space in which the experience of the other and of the self can take place; and this transitional space belongs to the field of illusion. Reality can surface thanks to a transition through illusion. That is to say that play, being the creation of a fictional frame, allows the internalization of what distinguishes this fictional frame from that of empirical reality. Hence, a child can play with objects that he treats as beings, or treat as objects the beings with whom he plays. Another key aspect of this cognitive process constituted by play appears by way of the primacy Winnicott accords to illusion (I would rather say to the fictional field, in the sense that I just pointed out) in order to access reality. Thus, all societies (and this is no surprise) have some equivalent of our fairytales and monster stories, and some of them have games played with immaterial fictional beings as partner-opponents. Besides, we should expect that relationships with the latter be at least partly determined by cognitive categories instilled by playing. This is what the following example of the shamanic ritual illustrates.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE OTHER BY "PLAYING" AND THE ROLE OF "ANIMATION"

It is remarkable that young children are prone to assigning the status of a person to transitional objects with which they play: the little girl talks to her doll, dresses and scolds it, making it a true partner in her "play"; her game remains informal, however she then treats her doll. It is also remarkable (and the idea is widespread) that play objects are considered to be "alive" for the duration of the game.[6] For instance, in Picardy, the *choulet*, an oblong leather ball (for some people, perhaps the ancestor of oval balls), must be "animated" before players, divided into two camps, start passing it (Forget-Decloquement 1999–2000: 289). In a way, the animation aims at making a *game* object a *play-frame* partner.

Amiluulha ("animating") is Buryat for a rite performed on the shaman's drum to make it operational during the ritual, as a material representative of an immaterial being (the shaman's double or spouse). This verb usually means granting *both* a form of life and a sort of soul to an inert body. It clearly expresses the mental operation consisting in transforming an object into a subject by granting it the status of an "other," counterpart to the "self."

If the Mongols do not actually say that they "animate" their arrows, jacks, or dice before throwing them, they often blow on them to draw luck, as we do on a coin or a die (Sodnom 1968). This means these objects into agents with the role of game partners, and the "effect" expected from them comes precisely from this *agency* (Gell 1998).

BUILDING SOCIAL RELATIONS ON THE MODEL OF PHYSICAL GAMES

Beyond the construction of the self and of the other, playing during the Games provides the mental and affective basis for social relationships, specifically for cooperation and opposition. Duty for all and for each, the Games are a collective realization, even though wrestlers and dancers are individuals (everyone represents the player category to which he or she belongs), and even though

6. The ivory of medieval chess pieces was considered a living material (Pastoureau 1990: 28–29).

they enjoy some freedom in how they carry out the duty.[7] Our Games are aimed at stimulating individual qualities while subordinating them to the public interest, and this matters with regard to their aptitude to become a medium of national identity.

Generally speaking, cooperation and opposition structure matrimonial economy by their very combination: alliance mechanisms organize all marriages between different kinship lines. This could lead one to think that, by opening up dancing to both sexes, and by excluding women from wrestling, the Games transform dancing into the expression of marriage as a complementary union between the two sexes, and wrestling into the expression of a system of alliances as a structure of rivalries between lines. Yet in social reality, it is marriage that prompts some dissymmetry between allied lines, and the alliance system, in its succession of marriages, that neutralizes the temporary dissymmetrical effects. At first glance, our Games seem to invert these principles at both levels. But upon closer examination, it appears that they share the staging of these two principles in a different way. Dance is a gathering round: it brings together youngsters from opposite sexes without making individual couples: all are partners, but those of same sex are not equal among themselves. The qualities they show individually distinguish them in the marriage market. Recently established contests between companies of dancer-singers introduce a formalized inner sanction into this type of game, from which it once was exempt. As regards wrestling, it confronts men in dual encounters, but does not allow the asymmetry of one-off confrontations to intervene. Like any dual game, it is firstly understood and experienced as establishing a relation in which each person could be the other: even though the outcome of a confrontation triggers the jealousy of one and the arrogance of the other, the winner knows he could be beaten in the next confrontation, and the loser knows he could win the next time. As Alain Caillé says in his "Brief remarks about fair-play":

> [. . .] as long as game remains a relation between individuals, an opportunity for individual victories or defeat, and always reversible in principle, winners and

7. For Gebauer and Wulf (1997: 49–50), it would be interesting to determine a threshold for which the elimination of references enables the players to really become unique. It seems difficult to do that in the case of our Games, for which references have changed over time (initially lineage, then region, ethnic group, and nationality), but without ever impeding individualization from becoming strongly apparent.

> losers are intricately interdependent and primordial one to the other. ([1994] 2005: 50)[8]

The winner undoubtedly sees his prestige soar, but he remains a wrestler like the others.[9] In the former Games, wrestlers taken two by two were seen as opponents, but all together were seen as partners in the same struggle,[10] as they were in the same round dance. This is different when victories are accumulated from one confrontation to the other, as is the case in the Games nowadays.

A single collective game can combine both principles, as shown by the "tug-of-war" in Korea. Both teams pull the rope toward them. The composition of the teams varies, but always expresses, one way or the other, the complementarity of the sexes: men on one side and women on the other, or mixed teams made up according to various criteria. Whoever is the victor, the game is supposed to bring wealth to the village community organizing it (Deschamps 1986). Here, the opposition relation does not cause any dissymmetry between winner and loser, because it is both collective and mixed, and part of a general relation of cooperation.

The two principles also combine in games such as dice or jacks, and in shooting. There is cooperation with the object, and the player sometimes summons it with his breath. Faced with the target or with the hoped-for configuration, there is an opposition, be it relating to oneself in previous games, to other players, or to an abstract ideal player.[11]

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8. This relation is not unique to play. When they hunt, shooter and beater are interdependent and mutually indispensable, and their positions are reversible. Generally speaking, they are allies, ideally brothers-in-law. When they play, they are equal in confrontation; when they hunt, they cooperate.
9. Here are some remarks from a zoologist, which could easily be applied to mankind: Social prestige works like an invisible peacock's tail. It attracts collaborators and deters rivals. For social animals, altruism can replace threats and aggressions in the competition for domination (Amotz Zahavi, Fyssen Foundation, 2011). This author is best known for his theory of "costly signals," such as the peacock's tail, which hinders its flight. This theory goes to show that, despite this impairment, the peacock survived, thus warning predators of his healthy condition and his great ability to fight, and signaling to females his mating potential.
10. The verb "to fight" allows the use of "with," "against," and "for."
11. Caillois ([1958] 1961: 29) opposes playing against an obstacle (*ludus*) to playing against an opponent (*agôn*). I shall make a similar distinction concerning the manner in which sanctions are made (see later in this chapter).

Actually, most of the Siberian Games combine both principles, their general value leaning toward one or the other, depending on the social stage from which they are taken into account. Animated by the preparatory vocation of "play," they *simultaneously* foster emulation based on individual qualities—physical and mental—and solidarity, which submits them to the common interest, that of positively tilting the relation to the world.

Everything can be an opportunity to compete

Consequently, the Siberian peoples watch out for all the possible singularities of individuals from the time of their youth on. Dance-type games are an opportunity to identify and stimulate them. For young wrestlers, dodges and the invention of efficient holds are the sought-after skills. And for dance-type games, the most prized individuals will be the highest jumpers, the loudest singers, or the best improvisers of verses. These games end up distinguishing the best from the poorer players, but this evaluation is not an internal sanction of dance, and does not put an end to it. The mechanism of singularity encourages emulation, and thus adds a dynamism to social life, while ensuring a necessary solidarity faced with the external world.

This is of particular note for the Evenk, known for their propensity to endlessly "compete," between men as well as between women, within their social group, or from one group to the next. The Buryats speak in such a case of "mutually showing one's strengths and qualities" (*shadal tenhee üzelcehe*), or, put more simply, of "competing" (*horilcoho*). The power relation independently reestablished in each dual game remains reversible, and does not influence the equivalence of status within a community. It demonstrates publicly what separates each player, but without—and this should be noted—categorizing them as winners or losers; they will simply be placed higher or lower on a scale of prestige and fame, which does not lead to any discrimination. Where men compete in strength and skill everywhere, women sometimes also compete between themselves, but in other fields of activities: for the Evenk people, by embroidery (Lavrillier 2005); for the Chukchi and Koryak, by throat singing (Nattiez 1999); and in Korea, by hopping on a tipping plank in order to destabilize each other (Fouquet & Paik 2005: 50).

There are also intellectual ways of competing: generally speaking, they are, like physical competitions, prohibited between blood relatives, and encouraged between potential allies. Both sexes compete separately, men between

themselves and women between themselves, by way of jokes, challenges, sung or spoken provocations, being issued from one group, and waiting for the other to go one step further.

For the Evenk, this constant and general propensity to compete results in a dynamic that encourages a taste for self-challenges, and even a taste for risk itself. In northeastern Buryatia, where some of them live, hunting is nowadays forbidden, and alcohol provides men with what a hunting lifestyle once brought them: the opportunity to take risks allowing them to select those with whom cooperation is desirable (Safonova and Sántha 2007). Yet drunken rivalries, the authors note, result in fatal quarrels or accidents. However, drinking is seen, here, as constituent of a frame conveying the message "this is play. . . ."

SEXUAL DISSYMMETRY AND MALE PRIVILEGE

By excluding women from wrestling, and by allowing men to dance as well, the Games obviously create a male privilege, which reverberates in the participants' experience. A winning wrestler is said to enjoy success with women. Young girls are said to be the most attentive spectators of the fights, as were probably the Roman women whom Juvenal would see growing excited upon watching the gladiators, or our distant foremothers, in front of whom knights would show off during tournaments during the era of courtly love.

The role of internal sanctions

The dissymmetry between the sexes drives me to investigate the internal sanction in wrestling: it establishes between the players a discrimination closing their encounter, granting the public status of victor to he who makes his opponent touch the ground, and of loser to the other. This mode of sanction ranks wrestlers on a scale combining strength and strategy, whereas that of archery contests, for instance, places the shooters on a scale combining strength and skill: the main purpose is to reach the target, before beating the other archers. Being the best wrestler translates into acknowledgment of a superiority in status, which matters within society. Being the best archer translates into a superiority in value, which matters with regard to the external world. The terms *bühe*, wrestler, and *mergen*, skillful archer, are the standard epithets of the Buryat epic heroes. It is significant that the skillful archer-hero's only duty is to seek

his betrothed (a metaphor for going hunting and bringing back game), while the wrestler-hero must additionally avenge his defeated father. In short, one is *mergen* for oneself, and *bühe* in comparison to other wrestlers. This is one of the reasons why, in time, *bühe* takes over from *mergen* (the epics in which the hero is *bühe* are more numerous and longer than those in which he is *mergen*, and the latter seem archaic): qualification as *bühe* institutionalizes superiority.

The following chapters will show that the existence of an internal sanction is the discriminating factor that goes hand in hand with the process of hierarchical centralization within society. Moreover, given that it materializes the idea of result, and validates it as such, it forms the basis of a divinatory or propitiatory function of certain forms of play that imply immaterial entities.

Progressive marginalization of dance-type games

This male privilege also appears in the respective places that wrestling and dancing hold in the Games' configuration. These vary in type, as the history of the Buryat Games in the twentieth century shows. In the Bride's Games, which are a private type of game, the dance type dominated, and wrestling's only role was to confirm the idea that a marriage suitor had to eliminate all rivals: combat was a mandatory prelude for marriage, and marriage was the final objective. The same wrestlers would soon wrestle during another Bride's Games, and another marriage would be at stake. Other dual and collective games enlivened these Bride's Games. Some of them (like the game of the ring which passes, hidden, from hand to hand, or like singing or joke contests) pitted players of both sexes against each other in opposing teams, that of the bridegroom and that of the bride. It was understood that the groom's side had to be the winner for the wedding to be a happy one. The same players could find themselves in different teams at a subsequent wedding. Though all these dual games were based on rivalry, they nonetheless fomented complementarity and cooperation in contexts such as those of our examples. But rivalry dynamics also risked unleashing the law of the jungle, therein lacking any regulating entity.

At the same type, the wrestling type dominated in the Buryat Games. When these were formalized in *Surharbaan*, at the beginning of the Soviet era, dance disappeared and wrestling changed: the individual victories were now aggregated to grant wrestlers prizes and titles, which established a hierarchy between them. Archery contests and horseracing assumed an increasing importance in this celebration. Its recent rebranding as the Three Manly Games, based on the Mongol

model, confirms a tendency which, under the guise of "virilizing the game," mainly aims at increasing its competitive aspect. Indeed, for some years now, this holiday has also hosted, as we have seen, female activities, and organized them as contests with prizes (beauty, dance, fashion, cooking, etc.): everything becomes hierarchical, under the rule that ensures the validity of classifications and rewards. But competition dynamics also risk spreading the seed of social breakdown.

In Siberia, Yakutia seems to be an exception regarding this tendency toward competition. Its national holiday is celebrated on the summer solstice, *yh̲yah*, and always includes a round dance with singing, *oh̲uohai*, in which great numbers of dancers hold hands.[12]

In the Mongolian world, the exception comes from the Tu or Monguor living in the Chinese province of Qinghai: their Games, *Nadun*, last sixty days, from July to September; they involve more than forty villages, who host them in turn. Centered on dances, they sometimes include wrestling, but never races. They come with offerings, processions, and parades with statues, reflecting the influence of the neighboring peoples, Taoist Hans and Buddhist Tibetans.[13]

Let us leave the Siberian and Mongolian world for a moment to draw a parallel as an illustration of wider-scale comparable tendencies: the tendency of internal sanction games to accompany the construction of political power by carrying with them collective identity; and the tendency of dance-type games to informally persist within the margins. One of these parallels can be linked to the Olympic Games. No one disputes their being called Games, even though they are not very playful. They bring together an array of sporting disciplines, which can seemingly be extended indefinitely, but contain rather few dual games,[14] and no dance-type games.[15] Let us recall that these Games were born of the ambition to establish equal chances at a global level by overcoming national particu-

12. My thanks to Alexandra Lavrillier and Emilie Maj for this information. However, according to Mészáros Csaba (2007–8: 126), nowadays, dances of school groups in costume are the main performances of the *yh̲yah*, and they are devoid of "sacrality."

13. Poster presented during the annual congress of the American Anthropological Association in Montreal in November 2011 by Haiyan Xing of the University of Florida.

14. The rankings of the Olympic disciplines available online show the relative weakness of games opposing two teams (tennis, football, hockey, etc. have their own international championships). Only individual dual games (fencing, boxing, wrestling, and judo) seem to have a strong and steady presence.

15. Although some national teams dance to present themselves during the opening ceremony.

larism (Fouquet and Paik, 2005: 58), the essential factor being participation. But with time, they became the best opportunity for national participants to highlight their identity value:[16] they provide each nation with a theatrical representation of its place in the sphere of individual and collective physical vitality.[17] Is it really so surprising that nation-states promote expensive competitions, while only mildly promoting dances and other shows?[18] And by contrast, is it so surprising that minority peoples, who have no national representation in the Olympic Games, embody their identity expression in their dancers and singers, and send them on tours abroad? The other parallel concerns the inclusion of military parades in numerous national holidays worldwide. These parades seem to be the indirect continuation of wrestling-type games, and, in France, the many neighborhood balls on the night of July 14 appear to be the continuation of dancing-type games: official demonstrations of national defense capacities taking center stage; popular festivities relegated to the gloomy fringes . . .

These are merely examples among others of the evolutionary tendency of public celebrations: competition seems to take precedence over cooperation. Our Games' transformations clearly show this tendency operating in the sociopolitical field. But how about the relationship to the world? While nowadays the Games celebrate only a vague renewal of nature, they were linked to a shamanic ritual in the pre-Soviet era when they prepared hunts. Let us question this ritual: in its own way, it sheds light upon the sexual dissymmetry stemming from the competitive use of the notion of internal sanction.

FACED WITH ANIMAL SPECIES, MANKIND IS MALE AND "PLAYS"

The shamanic ritual stages the relation to the world through the way in which the shaman represents his community in front of animal species and their spirits.

16. During the 1954 football World Cup in Switzerland, Korean newspapers expressed their hope of not seeing Korea eliminated quicker than Japan, because, ranked above its enemy, it would triumph over it, and overcome its long occupation (Fouquet and Paik 2005: 47–48).
17. It is likely that the Olympics' fame reinforces the Mongols' fondness for their Three Manly Games.
18. The fact that they control gambling, from which they draw financial benefits, comes down to another rationale.

In the imaginary couple he forms with his "spirit wife," each represents his or her own species. The sex difference matches the species difference: the male is human, the female is wild. The ritual makes the human group male through the shaman and through the players; and he who "plays" is a male. This inflects the perception of the exchange with animal species. Whereas this exchange is thought to be reciprocal, the ritual makes it as unequivocal as possible by taking on the male standpoint, and thus giving the initiative and the advantage to the human group. At the end of the ritual, the shaman surreptitiously offers himself as both woman[19] and game to the animal spirits, to complete the representation of the exchange. This imbalance in favor of the human "husband" allows the shamanic ritual to convey a doubly positive vision of the hunting lifestyle. It conceals its predatory aspect by presenting it in terms of matrimonial appropriation (the hunter does not say that he "kills" an animal, but that the animal "gives itself" to him out of love).[20] And it gives rhythm to the alternation of life and death in favor of the humans, by showing only those human actions which define the male, and which he decides. It gives the humans the active position, lengthily and conspicuously staged, leaving a moment of silence during the short final sequence.

Thus, playing is a male and active act for he who plays.[21] This positive aspect is reinforced by play's exposure to a discriminating internal sanction. As if the risk of such a sanction had to be taken, and hence as if a male position had to be adopted in order to assert one's legitimacy in the eyes of an invisible authority. This was once a reason for challenging a rival to a duel: victory was interpreted as the expression of divine judgment (Gebauer and Wulf 1997: 47). Thus, the shamanic ritual and its associated Games, which, together, position the group as a "playing male" confronted with animal species, grant it an advantage on principle.

19. From a similar perspective, Julian Pitt-Rivers (1990, 1994) interprets the fact that the matador's costume during a bullfight has a female look.

20. It is unsurprising that the assimilation of woman and game does not fully apply to the bear put to death during the "bear festival" (Kwon 1999: 381): raised by the group who captured it for this purpose, the bear is put to death like a sacrificial victim.

21. Huizinga ([1938] 1949: 45) phrased a similar analysis—"play is positive"—but with another purpose, that of the opposition between play and seriousness.

Taking the risk of sanction also gives the advantage in the epic song

What is it about the epic performance that replaces the shamanic ritual for the breeders? The possibility of competition overshadows that of cooperation. It is generally agreed that every participant gives the bard active support by frequently and insistently rekindling his song. Mainly, he must show that he lives the ordeals of the hero (*bühe*, wrestler) emotionally, as if they were his own. He lives in himself the obstacles that the hero encounters as a suitor—he holds his breath, and does not say a word—but he conspicuously shares with the other participants the impediments he faces as a warrior defending his kin—exclamations are heard. In other words, the hero's quest for marriage is individually internalized, whereas his fights, proudly recounted and boasted about, provoke collective outpourings of emotion. Socializing the hero's feats of war makes them potential supports for other fights. The hero's enemies can then be used for thinking of other enemies, those of the audience: depending on the era, the Russian settler, the Buddhist monk, or Hitler.[22] Is that to say that relationships of opposition are worthy of recounting, and that relationships of cooperation should be kept to oneself?

Play's cognitive properties are also based on its shape

The epic song conveys, therefore, the same values as the Games and the shamanic ritual, even though it does not pertain to "play." To illustrate the limits of this expansion, let us recall that the Republic of Buryatia, at the time of the USSR's collapse, when it dreamt of independence, had summoned up the hero Geser to give impetus to an ideal of self-defense. It intended to revive his character not thanks to the epic, which the local elites knew to be passé, but thanks to the Games, and to a large-scale display of his portrait (an innovation). It took less than ten years for this attempt to fail. There are obviously reasons for this failure within the political context, but it also challenges the changes of content and form. Buryat history shows both the generalization of defensive values in public events, and the increasing intellectualization of the forms conveying them. Thus, the substitution of Geser's portrait for the song of his feats deprives the representation and appropriation of these values of any dynamism. The associated Games do not grant his figure their own dynamics: the hero does not play in them, and those who play do not associate their victories with his image.

22. The references are in Hamayon (1990a: 151–286).

In short, the values conveyed are not enacted, and are therefore not internalized. This is what disappears with the withdrawal of "play," which did, however, remain in the narrative song, because the latter (as we will see in ch. 11), like play, reproduces an action in the process of occurring.

Let us make a brief evaluation. This chapter has sought to draw attention to the fundamental cognitive function of play as a process, which enables the player to construct himself as a subject, and learn relationships with "others" from various categories, while internalizing the associated values. This roots a property widely attributed to play: building an interaction structure. Will investigating the interactional dimension of play confirm the strong cognitive orientation which has appeared in this chapter? This orientation privileges the male position with respect to the female position, and, correlatively, play based on opposition—and subject to an internal sanction—with respect to play based on cooperation.

CHAPTER TEN

Interaction
Humans and their "others"

> He so played with men and heavenly gods that neither men nor gods were offended.
>
> – Étienne Pasquier in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*

It seems it is this dimension which, of all the paths opened up by the Batesonian notion of play as a *frame*, or as a context giving meaning to what unfolds within it, has had the most success in later works. Many great types of social phenomena in particular have been analyzed as interaction frames: the ritual, in which a condensation of interaction allows, among other things, for the resolution of conflicts, as shown by Turner (1969) or, more recently, by Houseman and Severi ([1994] 1998); social life itself, seen as a stage by Goffman (1967, 1974); and theater, by Schechner and Schuman (1977), Schechner and Turner ([1977] 1985).[1] For the most part, these works focus on the social aspects of these interactions. Yet the notion of interaction matters in our Games on two interdependent levels.

First of all, it matters on the level of the Games as a frame, for this level is their raison d'être in our main examples. This frame embodies an interaction structure between humans and imagined beings, the spirits of wild species that

1. These works have been briefly mentioned above, ch. 1.

the humans mimic. These spirits are not supposed to step in as players. They are the recipients of the human games, and their reactions are expected outside of the frame. There is thus some tension between the fictional nature of these interactions, and the fact that an "effect" is expected from them, a problem I will address in the next chapter. And secondly, it matters on the level of the constituent acts of this frame. These acts are by themselves concrete interactions between humans. Their form is determined by the goal of the action to be carried out on the wild species and their spirits. As our data outlines, the notion of play enables one to grasp the link between both levels of interaction, and the Siberian Games provide a rather simple illustration of this. Because "this is play," as Bateson would say, human fights and dances "do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* [the fights and preamble to lovemaking from which they draw their inspiration] would denote" in the animal world.[2] But, he adds, in these games, there is communication "about something which does not exist."[3] Here, I would rather say: fights and dances communicate about something which does not exist empirically, but to which they give a form of existence—in this case, about the spirits of wild species. Because it is in order to act upon them that humans wrestle and dance among themselves, to obtain from them a positive reaction. And it is by referring to these spirits that human fights and dances are established as such, namely as "noncombat" and "nonpreamble to lovemaking." The two levels of interaction justify each other.

ACTING THROUGH ANIMAL MODELS

The simplicity of our example is firstly due to the bodily aspect of interactions between humans. Though the animal meaning of the verbs they use is not always present in the mind of the participants, none of them denies that these verbs also apply, and indeed foremost, to animals, and all of them are conscious of the imitative basis of the gestures agreed upon.

2. "'This is play' looks something like this. These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote" (Bateson [1972] 1987: 185).

3. "Not only does the playful nip not denote what would be denoted by the bite for which it stands, but, in addition, the bite itself is fictional. Not only do the playing animals not quite mean what they are saying but, also, they are usually communicating about something which does not exist" (ibid.: 188).

On a primary level, wrestlers and dancers interact among themselves and with the participants, who look at them through animal models, namely in indirect or mediated fashion. Their gestures are conventional, and thus little influenced by the individual ways of performing them; however, they create automatisms which influence individual behaviors. In this way, they instill the idea that all opportunities are good for "competing," and that the Games' season must also be that of weddings. On a secondary level, the players interact, also in indirect fashion, with their models, the wild species. On both levels, their interactions are reinterpretations, because they originate from a selective and partial imitation. Thus, the imitated gestures are, on the one hand, reinterpreted as preparation for real future interactions between humans, and, on the other hand, transformed into imaginary actions on the model species.

A similar idea permeated agrarian festivities in ancient China:

> Songs and games always dictate human behavior if the latter want to help nature; while they remind nature of all its traditional duties. During the spring celebrations, young people sing about floods and the partridge's calling. In the celebration's reality, these interdependent signals provoke one another: this dance and this song, while making the partridges mate and the water level rise, will allow all the signals of springtime to appear. (Granet [1934] 1968: 57–58)

The mere word "spring," Granet says, rouses all possible alternatives to the anguishes of love, and compels whoever listens to it to feel a feeling of vitality, and of full harmony with nature's will. At the end of his book, the author shows how Taoism drew from these ideas a "recipe for holiness": ethics and aesthetics to inspire daily life.

> Practices whose main aim is for there to be "no place for death" in the Sacred embody the art of *feeding* (or increasing) *life*. A great principle governs them. To increase, or even maintain, one's vitality, every being must adopt a *regime fitting the rhythm of universal life*. One must exercise, or, even better, dance and frolic in animal fashion. (Granet [1934] 1968: 417–19)

According to the Siberian data, action upon immaterial entities is always the first motivation. One must play "to obtain luck for hunting," "for the year to be good," or "for the rain to fall," that is to say, for a purpose located in a time to come, and which we try to take hold of. This rests on the assumption that

human play exerts a favorable influence on these entities that are supposed to set the course of events.

"REJOICE" IMMATERIAL BEINGS[4]

At first, imitating the specific behavior of game-species at the beginning of the mating season in order to have luck for hunting can be seen as a way of holding a mirror up to these species to encourage them to mate: a legitimate concern for a hunting people, whose own reproduction is determined by that of game.

During the Games, fights and dances differ from other imitative behaviors aimed at drawing animals closer, such as the bird calls intended for this or that wildfowl. Fights and dances do not aim at coming into contact with *real* animals; performed outdoors in daylight, they would, moreover, cause the game to flee. They are a *representation*: they "represent" something other than what they show (I will come back to this idea in the next chapter, about the dramatic dimension of play), and this representation is obviously intended for the imitated species, because it is supposed to act upon them. I do not know how to put it more clearly: Is it the species considered *in abstracto*? Is it the spirit of the species, or indeed its members as a whole? And this question probably has no meaning for the peoples concerned. In their eyes, the Games are useful because they "rejoice" the animal spirits.[5] Playing, dancing, singing, the Buryats say, all of this "rejoices" the animal spirits, "pleases" them, because all of this is a testament to human joy.[6]

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4. The term "immaterial," which I use in this book in its most common sense, is no more satisfactory to define these beings I also call spirits than that of "invisible": generated by the collective imagination, they are perceived as having a form of existence in another reality; they can be made visible, whether they are materialized by an object, or represented by an individual who is supposed to embody them for a ritual.

5. This expression, purposely vague, encompasses the species' spirits (generic, not linked to bodies, and immortal), and the souls of individual animals (linked to their body during their lifetime, and fated to be recycled after death, to come again, and animate a new animal body of the same species). There is nothing here to suggest that human Games are intended for one more than the other; everything suggests that they are intended for both at the same time.

6. The most used verb is *bayasuulha*: "to rejoice." It is thought to be derived from the substantive *bayar*, "joy," the final r of which would have been dropped, though it

"Rejoicing" the Gods was the explicit objective of the Roman Circus Games; the Romans designed them as a showcase for the reign of joy, *laetitia*.

The idea that the Games *please* the Gods is widespread in ancient Greek texts, as is the symmetrical and opposite idea that they *displease* the Christian God in the texts of the church fathers.

The idea that human games please the invisible beings is still present today, for example for the Kalash, a mountain people of the Hindu Kush in Pakistan: "The pleasure of souls, spirits, and gods depends on the smooth execution of dances and songs!" the shaman declaims to encourage those participating in the celebration (Loude and Lièvre 1984: 129). Likewise, among the Himalayan peoples, rituals of prosperity are based on masquerades with fancy costumes and jesters' pantomimes (Dollfus and Krauskopff 2014).

In Taiwan, processional troupes wander from village to village in order to perform (drama, music, dance, martial arts) in front of holy spirits and wandering souls; and retransmissions are even offered on giant movie screens set outdoors (Fiorella Allio, oral communication).

"Rejoice" to divert, create a diversion

The spirits to please for those who live off hunting in Siberia, those of game-species, are perceived as being fond of many sensory pleasures. What rejoices them the most, it is said, is to see humans wrestle and dance, to hear them sing, and in the manner of the species themselves of which they are the spirits. But how is that liable to rejoice them? Are they supposed to understand these imitations as ways of encouraging members of the species they animate to mate? From an analytical point of view, it is a cosmological fiction that makes the spirits exist; in this fiction, the forms of subjectivity humans attribute to these spirits are generally the ones that suit them (the humans) best:[7] they ascribe to them

would have remained in the doublet verb *bayarluulha*. It is often associated with *bayan*, "wealthy," the final n of which is regularly dropped to form other derived forms such as *baylig*, "wealthy," or *bayarhag*, "rich person, who boasts about his wealth." The designation "wealthy" is usually attributed to the spirits seen to be prevailing over a game-rich environment, such as the Buryat Bayan Hangai, or the Yakut Baai Bayanai. Human joy is associated with the hope of food abundance.

7. This fiction is generally shared by members of the community, who act accordingly, whatever their degree of personal compliance to the existence of spirits, and however conscious they are that it is a fiction. On the phenomenon of belief, I

feelings, intentions, and reactions matching the actions they intend to exert on them to influence them for their benefit. The community that makes its youth play in order to "rejoice" the animal spirits asks its shaman to perform *at the same time*, on the pretext of the "love" that the female spirit he "marries" bears him, a less than pleasing act to the animal kingdom that she represents. For he must draw as many game promises from her as he can, while keeping the promises of compensation in terms of human vitality to a minimum. Here, the purpose of inventing fictitious partners becomes truly apparent: only certain partners will react positively to such objectively unfavorable acts! "Rejoice" thus appears as a euphemism to conceal the ritual's true objective taken as a whole: the Games are aimed at sufficiently "entertaining" or "diverting" the animal spirits so that they do not hinder the shaman from taking advantage of the married female spirit's "love." This is yet another euphemism, turning the hunter's predation into a loving gift on the part of his prey (Hamayon 2010). We can now see why the shaman insists on making the youngsters play during the whole ritual, and why he insists on giving his own jumps and aerial head-butts the appearance of *real* fighting and mating. There is a division between the hunters' "play" (their "doing like" an animal, without really doing it) and the shaman's (his "doing as if" he were an animal, by actually doing in this fictitious frame what the animal would do in reality). One diverts, while the other operates.

The result of the shaman's ritual represents an objective loss for the games species spirits, and, similarly, the result of the epic is a loss for the hero's father-in-law. And the same goes for the stories the hunters tell on the eve of the hunt so that wild game ritual promises come true. Everywhere in Siberia, in sing-song voices, hunters tell sensual and suggestive stories before going to sleep. They hope to be granted lustful dreams in their sleep, but dream of lust only, so that reality may materialize this desire the following day, in the form of beautiful game come to meet the hunters. These stories must also please the spirits, and make them laugh so much, the hunters hope, that they end up letting the more beautiful animals come to them,[8] like the crow in La Fontaine's fable,

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will discuss later the very possibility of individual variations leading to diverging representations liable to qualify shared representations. But only the latter could account for the ritual practices established by custom.

8. According to the Buryats surveyed, what pleases the games species spirits are, inseparably, tales and the laughs they generate for the hunters. The spirits are not themselves said to "laugh." With regard to them, the only recurring terminology is that of joy, but laughter is seen as a potential corollary.

who, flattered by so much praise, opens his beak and drops his prey. Or, rather, like those "music-loving stags" seduced by "lecherous hunters" in old Mexico, as Guilhem Olivier explains:

> Hunting and sexuality are tightly intertwined, both in stories and in Amerindian ethnography, be they from the North, the South, or the Centre: some say "shooting a stag" to talk about sexual intercourse, others interpret the dream of a naked woman giving herself to the hunter as a good omen, or assimilate stag hunts to the abduction of women. (Olivier 2010: 60–62)

Thus, gestural and vocal forms combine to delight the animal kingdom. They address the animals and their species' spirits, assuming that the latter's general sensibilities resemble those of humans, though differing in one crucial aspect. They assume that animals and spirits are sensitive to appearances, but nothing more. The idea of concealing behind the expression of joy and love the wish to "entertain," in the sense of distracting the attention, is strictly human.[9] Animals and spirits are supposed to take these rejoicings, which aim at dimming their awareness, as such. They are fooled by them, just as animals of some species are by lures devised by animals of other species. It is part of the game between species: some play, others *are played*. (in our understanding of the term).

As a whole, even though epic songs and jokes do not actually belong to "play," they are extensions of this play, and are thus a continuation of it: they aim at giving the advantage to the human who uses them, thereby confirming the *active* orientation of the act of playing, and the privilege of he who initiates it. Whether the humans play, sing, or laugh, they make light of the game species spirits, and the latter are fooled—or *played*.

"Rejoicing" dead humans to revitalize them

There also are dead humans among the spirits wandering in nature, and we must see the link, though variable and barely explicit, between the organization of the Games and the dead in Siberia. The joy that the Games bring to the dead also matters in relation to the effect that is expected of them. This link explains the

9. Previous inquiries gave me the opportunity to notice that the capacities bestowed upon spirits are always limited, but different for those stemming from animals and those stemming from human souls; this will be discussed later.

meaning of funeral place given to the Buryat expression *naadani hada*, "mountain of games" (see above, ch. 4, n. 8). It also explains the primarily funerary aspect recognized in cairns, *ovoo* (heaps of rocks and branches covered in various objects), next to which the *Naadam* had to be held (see above, ch. 3).[10] Nowadays still, in many regions, Mongols believe that the cairns overlooking the pastures have the role of marking their hereditary rights on the land, proof of an ancestral presence (Chuluu and Stuart 1995); some carry out rituals and games on these cairns.

Among the Buryat herders of the pre-Soviet era, regular public rituals were carried out by the elders of the patrilineage. They prayed to the ancestors, and sacrificed domestic animals to them.[11] Wrestling, dances, and other games were then, along with feasts, relegated to being mere annexes aiming at rejoicing both the living and the dead. In return, the descendants expected "protection" from their ancestors,[12] in whom they saw the guarantors of their rights upon their pastures and their herds. Thought of as a whole, prayers and sacrifices, games and feasts express a vertical interaction of lineage solidarity. One side of this solidarity demands, from top to bottom, control and protection, and from bottom to top, respect and obedience: this can be seen in the invocations the living direct to their ancestors, which contain not expressions of joy, but rather complaints and requests. The other side, expressed in games and feasts, rejoices and revitalizes the dead: it implies that they "live," and that, like the living, they must eat meat to do so. But nowadays, Buryats are no longer herders; only a few neo-shamanic rituals, sporadically organized, comprise animal sacrifices. As for their Games, *Surharbaan* or Three Manly Games, all invisible recipients have disappeared, as have all traces of offerings or blood spills, without stripping the Games of their value as positive augurs for the future.

10. This was the same for the Buryats east of Lake Baikal, close to the Mongols (Galdanova et al. 1983: 119–50). For those of the west, cairns of another type, called *barisa*, were still considered during the twentieth century to be resting places for the souls of the dead; every passer-by would stop to offer a few pinches of tobacco and some sweets.

11. In these rituals, which replaced, for the herders, some aspects of the hunters' shamanic rituals, sacrifices to the ancestors took the place of the episode in which the shaman offers himself as game to the animal spirits. Sacrificed animals were perceived as substitutes for the humans who raised them (Hamayon 1990a: 641–42).

12. In the anonymous crowd of the ancestors, only the deceased who had lived and died by the rules were included, namely the ones who had assured the continuity of their line. The dead without descendants received personal worship with prayers and sacrifices, but no games.

Elsewhere in contemporary Siberia, the only rituals to explicitly mention the dead of the group are those of the Even, who, as we have seen, make demographic tallies: How many were we last year? And how many this year? The Koryaks of Kamchatka count the animals they have hunted, and then build the same number of substitutes they ritually send back in their world to obtain luck (*imrai*) for the following season (Plattet 2005: 277). In death, everyone remains a potential member of his or her group: the soul, once recycled, must come back for a new life in a new being of the same line if it is human; in a new being of the same species if it is animal. The other Siberian peoples never forget to sing songs to invite the souls of their dead to attend the Games, and to benefit from the food offerings in order to favor their return on earth. All of them somehow link human perpetuation to animal perpetuation: exchanges between their respective worlds means that life in one comes at the cost of death in the other.

INTERACTIONS CAUSING ALTERNATION BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

> Gods are mortal, humans immortals: living their death, dying their life.
>
> – Heraclitus, Fragment 67

Thus, already by the end of the sixth century BC, Heraclitus had formulated an idea similar to that of our hunters. However, the Greek Games were aimed not at animal spirits, but at the souls of the dead. Those described in the *Iliad* had been wished for by Achilles to accompany the funeral of his friend Patroclus. In Rome, gladiator fights were originally destined to honor the dead: the church fathers' first reason for condemning the Circus Games lay precisely in the fact that they addressed the dead. In France, in 1000 AD, "diabolical games" were mostly carried out during funeral wakes (Poly 1992: 182).

Many societies, ancient and contemporary, link commemoration of the departed to wealth (mainly agricultural) in festivals including wrestling, dancing, and other games.[13] Vladimir Propp ([1963] 1987) dedicates the first

13. The pleasure the dead take in games is often mentioned, even without any relation to obtaining wealth. The Kalash of Pakistan dance during funerals because "dancing

chapter of his book *Russian agrarian feasts* to this link, and another to the link between "death and laughter"; he investigates at length the reasons for these links, for which there are numerous accounts across the centuries (ibid.: 23–35, 85–122).

> In Russian data, we do not have tears during funerals and laughter at rebirth, we have a mixture of both; while some simulate sorrow, others leap and laugh. [. . .] Laughing did not act on nature in a direct way, but through the revival of these anthropomorphic beings, who were put to death and revived in herbs and grass, or who, by dying and reviving, were "harvest-makers." (Propp [1963] 1987: 122)

In Tahiti, all groups jointly celebrate three events: the second funeral of their members, games (wrestling, boxing, dancing, etc.), and harvests. They comply with a rule forgiving any potential violence during this celebration, because, on such an occasion, no one harms anyone else on purpose. There is a strong relationship between the dead and the fertility of the soil, the agrarian cycle, and funeral rites (Babadzan 1993: 196, 240–41, 245–46, 269). The point in these ceremonies is not really to celebrate abundance, or celebrate the dead, but to assert that one implies the other.

Spilling blood as the price for life

The ritual spilling of human blood observed in many a peasant society (it "waters the furrows") corresponds to the animal sacrifices associated with ritual games in many pastoral societies. Frazer gives numerous examples in *The golden bough*. Gladiator combats were needed to reinvigorate the souls of the dead, and to spill gladiator blood on Jupiter's face (Piganiol 1923). In Bolivia, the death of a fighter during the Indian *tinku* ritual is not an accident, but part of the ritual (Molinié 1988: 54). In the center of rural France, during the Ancien Régime, it was customary to say that the harvest would not be good if the Bachellerie (a youth celebration with games, contests, dances, and insults) did

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well pleases the dead" (Loude and Lièvre 1984: 152). Lévi-Strauss ([1962] 1966: 31) writes about the Algonquians' funeral games: "It is as if the living offered the dead the consolation of a last match before finally being rid of them"; of the two teams into which the players are divided, the one representing the deceased must always win.

not take place, but also that a good Bachellerie is one in which blood is spilt (Pellegrin 1979–82).

In some villages in Picardy, men still play the *soule* on Shrove Tuesday and at Easter; otherwise, it is believed, the harvest will be poor. It is a rather simple village game, but with many prescriptions and prohibitions. Men, divided into two teams, pass the *choulet*—an ovoid object made of leather, and crafted at the expense of the latest married couple—to each other, before throwing it over the roofs of two houses in the village, some distance away from one another (Forget-Decloquement 1999–2000). There is nothing to suggest any invisible entity, but the whole game is supposed to favor the harvest. What is important here is the existence of "remission letters" in the archives that Françoise Forget-Decloquement (ibid.: 283, n. 14) consulted regarding this medieval game. Such "remission letters" consisted in remitting the sentences of those condemned for violence carried out during the *soule*. They were issued by the king or by feudal lords, answering a request from the offender himself, or, more frequently, from his kin. Having read some 1500 letters issued between 1200 and 1400, the author makes a two-fold observation: that many requests relating to blows and injuries were received during the *soule*, and the guilty were granted pardon. The *soule* was obviously an opportunity for settling personal scores in a climate of relative impunity, as the long tradition of remission abundantly shows. But mainly, during a game of *soule*, blood had to be spilt,[14] and it was good to show that one had fought well, and what better proof of this than physical traces, bruises, and scratches. . . . And in the evening, the winner would open the ball with the most recently married young woman (ibid.: 292); both teams' players belonging to the same group of villages, the dual stake and the sexual stake intertwine. These remissions of penalties can be seen as the expression of the fact that interactions between humans in such a context have a particular status. That blood is spilt as a result belongs to the rules of the game, and even determines the "effect" expected of it. The blows are not really blows, for the players fight not for the sake of fighting, but for the harvest to be good. Even though, today, the motive of a good harvest is no longer invoked to justify the blood on the *soule* players' shirts, blood continues to stain them.

14. Data from seminary presentations, École pratique des hautes études and Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative de l'Université de Paris-X, 1993–96.

Therefore, we cannot agree with all the specificities of this type of ritual that Hocart stresses. And the expression *life-giving ritual* he uses for it is somewhat deceptive. Though he acknowledges throughout the existence of links between obtaining life and giving death, even though these tasks are entrusted to different institutions, he opposes them on both a logical and moral level: "The character of warrior is entirely at variance with that of a maintainer of law and order. How came these opposite qualities to be united in the same person?" (Hocart [1936] 1970: 157). However, our examples show that life and death are mutually implied in such games; if the spilling of blood, which is the consequence, is violence to us, it is not to the societies performing these kinds of games. Therefore, we cannot fully agree with Maurice Bloch (1992) on his interpretation, in terms of violence, of the process of regeneration, on which he sheds light in numerous rituals; these rituals comprise, in a variable order, both the acquisition and loss of virility for humans. I cannot agree with him either on his use of the notion of predation to define this violence. This is not how Siberian hunters consider hunting: they strive to conceal the predatory aspect, and to make hunting simply about taking meat under the pretext of the animal's loving gift. They also ritually promise some of their own dead as a counterpart, for such is the law of interaction between species for them.

Let us remember the following from the examination of "play" as an interaction structure. Our Games articulate two interdependent levels. Players *interact between themselves to act upon* immaterial entities from which they expect a positive reaction, which shapes the form of player interaction. These make up a *representation* aiming at diverting or entertaining the invisible, and incite them to react in positive fashion. Therefore, the notion of representation will be a core part of our next chapter.

The following will remain implicit: the notion of interaction structure on two interdependent levels could define many other rituals than our Games. These formerly implied defined immaterial entities. But nowadays, even though they do not refer to any invisible being at all, the same properties are still attributed to them as before. The notions of representation offered to invisibles, and of belief in them, which I will deal with next, will raise the following question: Is the capacity of being endowed with a potential "effect" upon reality an inherent potentiality of play? This would explain at the same time how so many games seem to have a ritual appearance, and so many rites have the formal structure of play. Still, should we be able to define this potentiality, and to clearly determine that there is "rite" or "ritual"? There is no consensus on this

topic, and I have used these terms, which often appear in my sources, without referring to a precise definition. Up until now, nothing has truly distinguished rite or ritual from play. However, it is clear that there exist some ritual categories that are impossible to reconcile with the Games. Investigating the dramatic dimension of playing would not lead to anything on this matter, because its feature within the Games, that of being endowed with an "effect" upon reality, also defines the ritual. Only in chapter 13, on the topic of indeterminacy, will I come back to this question.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Dramatization
Representing and generating an "effect"

> Are you genuine? Or merely an actor? A representative? Or that which is represented? In the end, perhaps you are merely a copy of an actor. Second question of conscience.
>
> – Nietzsche, *Twilight of the idols*

This chapter stems from the idea that the main objective of the ancient Games was to entertain the spirits, echoing the idea that Circus Games in ancient Rome were a show both for the gods and for the Roman people. In Siberian languages, and in many others, the verbs for "to play" have different meanings, among which "to represent," and even "to play on stage," and expressions such as "play a role" are frequent.

Many works focus on the notion of play through drama, just as many works investigate the ritual origins of theater. Rozik (2003) gives an overview of the three main theoretical schools of thought which have tried to establish a link between ritual and theater. The first one, the Cambridge School of Anthropology at the beginning of the twentieth century, made an attempt on the basis of the narrative elements which ritual and theater share; the second one on the basis of the similarity of the shaman's and the actor's experiences: both of them express identities different from their own (Kirby 1977). The third school has

seen links between ritual and theater in the notion of performance, a source of both entertainment and "efficiency" in a variable equilibrium (Schechner and Schuman 1977). I agree with Rozik's criticism regarding these schools of thought, and I reject, like him, the reductionism of the first two, which lead one to consider theater as a result of the disintegration of ritual; and the third's lack of specificity: the notion of "performance" can encompass many other activities. However, there remains something, Rozik says, which encourages one to believe both in a link and in a threshold between ritual and theater, and there is justification in trying to determine them, though in other ways than those that make of theater a medium either for ritual ends, or which takes its source in ritual.

There is no reason to establish a relation of derivation from ritual to theater, Rozik adds, nor from play to ritual, or from play to theater. This seems to be the ambivalent conclusion of most of the authors who, without truly belonging to these schools of thought, have sought to analyze the relations between play, rite, ritual, and theater.[1] They have affirmed the difficulty of such a project, but continued trying nonetheless, convinced that the feeling of their proximity was as well founded as that of their difference.

Can we compare play, ritual, and theater as event units, as social phenomena, without coming up against the fact that there is something theatrical in ritual, and ritualistic in play, depending on the topics and context? Would it be more effective to base ourselves on the nature of participation, as Goffman does (1967, 1974)? According to him, only in ritual is participation active, because ritual makes everyone a *performer* as it shares out the roles generally, whereas theater separates actors and spectators distinctly. But on what can we really base ourselves to assess the involvement of participants? The latter do not always pay attention, nor indeed are they always present during a ten-day ritual; and who says that everyone must take an active part in it? And yet, regardless of whether he or she is idle or absent-minded, the participant nevertheless benefits from the ritual.

The distinction would be clearer between the actor and the ritual specialist. This is what the following pages aim at showing, dedicated as they are to the notion of *representation*, and more specifically to its *performative* potentiality, which gives its full range to the dramatic dimension of play. The ritual specialist, insofar as his purpose is to represent an invisible entity, is by definition vested with some capacity for action on behalf of whom he represents; in contrast, the

1. Leiris ([1938] 1980); Turner (1982a); Köpping (1997); Bansat-Boudon (1998); Tarabout (1998), etc.

actor "embodying" a character on stage is not. Thus, we can say that representation, in our examples (Games or shamanic ritual), has a dramatic dimension, which is not merely theatrical but also *performative*,[2] insofar as it gives reality to the interactions represented, and bestows an "effect" upon them. Based on the staging of a narrative, the dramatic dimension is shared by play and theater. The implications of its performative function, namely the creation of the expectation of an "effect" on empirical reality, are, for their part, common to play and ritual. Briefly mentioned in this chapter, these implications will be further questioned in the next.

Our Games have both ritual and theatrical aspects, without referring to these notions explicitly. No term really translates "ritual" in Buryat (or in Mongol). The most widely used term in this sense is *yoholol* (Mongol *yoslol*), derived from *yoho(n)*, "custom, rule, tradition, celebration,"[3] which is sometimes used to designate the Games. And "theater" is *teatr*. In the shaman's simulation, there is an obvious dramatic dimension explaining the comparisons with play and theater. It was present in the ancient Games, because these were understood as a representation for the spirits, but the notion of representation does not apply to today's Games, which are mainly seen as competitions between humans. It does not seem to be enough to account for the "effect" they are believed to possess, for instance, because there is nothing to say that these competitions "represent" anything other than themselves.

But what is "representing?" Former fights and dances do not "represent" in the same way as do the interactions with the invisible entities that the shaman simulates, even though an "effect" is expected both from the former and from the latter. And the playlets that the shaman mimes do it in yet another fashion, as they are not supposed to influence reality.

"REPRESENTING"

Basically, to represent means "to make present" something which cannot or must not be so. In medieval English,

2. This linguistic notion was made famous by John L. Austin (1962). A statement is performative when it realizes what it states; thus, it accomplishes another act than that of merely stating.

3. The Mongolian language may specify *mörgöl* (religious act), *yoslol* if the ceremony is religious, *zhuram* (law) *yoslol* if it is political.

> Represent appeared in English in [the fourteenth century] [. . . and] quickly acquired a range of senses of making present: in the physical sense of presenting oneself or another, often to some person of authority; but also in the sense of making present in the mind [with stories . . .] and of making present to the eye, in painting [. . .] or in plays [. . .]. But a crucial extension also occurred in [the fourteenth century], when represent was used in the sense of "symbolize" or "stand for" [. . .]. It is clear that at this stage there was considerable overlap between the sense (a) of making present to the mind and the sense (b) of standing for something that is not present. (Williams [1976] 1983: 266–67)[4]

Hence, what "represents" is at the same time *different* from what is represented, and considered as an *equivalent* in *another* field. This distinguishes representation from substitutes, the latter being *worth less* than what they replace in the *same* field, but draws it closer to play as a frame in which the acts do not mean what the acts "for which they stand" would mean, according to Bateson's wording.

The Games of our examples represent acts, but these acts change with time, both in form and in content. Thus, these acts nowadays are no longer related to the spirits of the wild species waiting to be entertained. Of course, the animal inspiration remains in wrestling, even if only through the persistence of the vocabulary through time, and hunting and herding activities still serve as external references for archery and horseracing. But the participants' and the spectators' interests have shifted, and now focus on two aspects developed under Soviet influence: the sporting event, and the national contest, into which new types of games that do not refer to activities practiced in reality have recently been integrated. And more importantly, there is no mention today of spirits to entertain, only a vague "Nature," the renewal of which the Games must celebrate. For an "effect" is always expected from the Games as such, not from "Nature": without them, the year "would not be good."

However we account for this seemingly paradoxical change—the Games are supposed to keep having an "effect" upon reality, even though they no longer address spirits—it does, in any case, invalidate one of the arguments for

4. According to Daniel de Coppet, in ancient French a representation was a special construct aimed at "making someone present *again*" (1992: 120). The author then presents the various constructions used during a king's funeral to make the royal authority "present" whilst waiting for the investiture of a new king.

distinguishing ritual from play: the implication of immaterial entities is not mandatory to assign the Games the capacity to influence reality like a ritual. Similarly, there is no invocation of invisible entities in the background of the Olympics, yet the viewers respond to their ritual aspect; nor in the background of chess tournaments, yet Thierry Wendling ends his inquiry by emphasizing the need to investigate their ritual aspects, because "we cannot be satisfied by the idea that games taste like rite but are not" (2002: 239). We must thus look into play itself[5] to find the source of this ritual potential, and ask ourselves what distinguishes the ritual "effect" credited to play from that credited to other modes of action that are unambiguously labeled ritual, like prayer or sacrifice.

Let us reassess the shamanic ritual from the standpoint of its dramatic dimension, called "play" itself in Turkic and Tungusic languages; it is often characterized as theatrical in descriptions, and sometimes deemed to be the origin of theater itself (Kirby 1977). This type of ritual is functionally theatrical, insofar as it wants to represent beings *taking action*.

REPRESENTING BEINGS, REPRESENTING ACTS

For this reason, the shaman is sometimes compared to the possessed. Their respective approaches nonetheless illustrate two opposite conceptions of the relation between the ritual specialist and the spirits to whom he gives a "presence effect."[6] The represented spirit is supposed to be *inside* the body of the possessed, *outside of* the shaman's body. Michel Leiris ([1938] 1980) gives his book about possession among the Ethiopians of Gondar a title which highlights the "theatrical aspects," while Alfred Métraux (1955) talks of "ritual comedy" in possession. In a chapter of his book *Music and trance*, Gilbert Rouget ([1980] 1985) imagines a thread linking possession ceremonies with lyrical theater and

5. The virtual game Second Life is at first a *game*, but quickly becomes *play* for the player (Boellstorff 2008).

6. Mircea Eliade ([1951] 1964) pointed out a now classic opposition between the shaman, who "journeys" among the spirits, and the "possessed," who leaves his body for them to use. But actually, we must not oppose two types of ritual specialists, but rather two approaches, which can coexist in the same ritual for the same specialist—approaches also aiming at giving an "effect of presence" to spirits, but to different kinds of spirits, in opposing spaces and with different purposes.

opera. Concerning possession,[7] the vocabulary of play is widespread but its use demonstrates a conception of the relation to the spirits opposed to the shamanic conception. The shaman is in the player's position, and the game species spirits are "played with" (see chs. 10 and 16). In possession, the verb "to play" in its active form applies not to the possessed, but to the spirit who possesses him or her.[8] The spirit has an active, masculine role, and the possessed, who in a way is "played with," is usually thought of as feminine, even if he is a man (e.g., in the case of the Burmese *naguedo*, cf. Brac de la Perrière 1989, 2009).

The vocabulary of play is also encountered in other forms of dramatic spirit representations. In Central Asia, ritual specialists "make the spirits play"; the Uzbek specialist makes his own "wrestle" against the troublemaking spirits by slashing the air with saber blades; the Uyghur specialist makes the *peri* spirits who "like" his music and his way of spinning "dance" (Basilov 1992: 162–206). In the Aomori area, in northwestern Japan, women specialists called *kamisama* "make the *kami* play." One we met goes to a nearby Buddhist monastery every year to make her own *kami* play: these are two tall anthropomorphic figurines (a male and a female) dressed in parade suits, which she manipulates to make them dance and jump.[9]

Formerly, in certain contexts, the Buryat shaman engaged in behaviors similar in form to possession, but not in meaning. He was considered to be "possessed" neither when he "incorporated" his ancestors (his body shaking from head to toe in a circumstance in which, the shamanic function being inherited, he was entitled to benefit from their help), nor when he "embodied" the souls of the dead unable to become ancestors, so that the living could communicate with them (he talked to them and answered them on behalf of the dead, breathing sighs of frustration). These actions were not called play, and were accompanied by no games.

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7. Examples have been given above, ch. 1.

8. This is the case for the verb *nolda-* in Korea (Kim 1989). In languages derived from Sanskrit, the verb *khelna~khelnu~khelne*, "to play," is used for ritual combat, in the active form for whoever is in a powerful position, and in the passive form for whoever fights against someone stronger than him, and for the Nepalese Magar, divinities "play," including in the humans' bodies (Van Woerkens 1992; Lecomte-Tilouine 1993: 207–8).

9. The ritual is called *kami asobuse* (communication by a *kamisama* from the Aomori area, February 2011). I thank Katsuhiko Takizawa for his help during the inquiry.

However, playlets were different: much like an actor, the shaman "embodied" (literally "brought in," *oruulaha*) the "spirits of play," *naadanai ongon*—we would say "spirits for laughs" (see above, ch. 4). He mimed types of characters and types of behaviors, such as a bear walking heavily, or a casual-looking smoker. These playlets were seen both as entertainments, and as proof of the shaman's aptitude for representing spirits; he did it "for laughs," which likened these playlets to stage play. This was also the main purpose of the "tricks" which punctuated the rituals: they showed the shaman's force or skill, strengthened his popularity, and distracted the audience all at the same time; they normally expressed no *action* on his part upon the spirits.[10]

However, during his inauguration ritual, the Buryat shaman had to climb a tree, and then, without coming down to the ground, had to pass from tree to tree, clinging on to their branches. If he reached the ninth tree without falling, it meant the spirits had supported him, so as to show their trust in him.[11] While the mimetic playlets and the tricks could be seen as *mere theater*, because, even poorly executed, they did not really question the shaman's legitimacy, this trial was *more than theater*, because, leading one to believe in the shaman's invisible supports, it publicly determined his taking office.

The shaman's mode of action, which I have called simulation, and which generated the "presence effect" of the spirits, and gave a form of reality to the actions exerted upon them, was, in this sense, more than theater as well. Performing an epic had a similar power of action. Yet both, full of constraining meaning, disappeared during the twentieth century, whereas the Games, stripped of all shamanic elements, and made up of new games, were maintained as a public event, from which an "effect" was expected. Soviet policies obviously had something to do with this variety of fates, but in what way? In the name of the fight against religion, and national unity, it eliminated autochthonous ritual specialists, and fought off the ideas they spread; in the name of the ideal of progress, it extolled sports competitions; and in the name of political integration, it fomented the ritualization of public events in order to fill the psychic void left by the forced deletion of religious practices. But this does not explain why the Games

10. However, these tricks are not "para-theatrical," as Kirby says (1977), for whom these tricks (ventriloquism, conjuring, magic), as evidence for the waning faith in the shaman's ability to dominate the spirits, would mark the passing from ritual to theater: the participants would simply be spectators, and all effectiveness would be lost.

11. Eremeev, Hangalov, Shternberg etc. quoted in Hamayon (1990a: 475–76).

still bear an "effect." If their believed trait of acting upon reality has nothing to do with what they represent, nor with possible invisible recipients, has it something to do with the specificities of playing as a manner of representing?

REPRESENTING AN ACTION IN THE VERY PROCESS OF ITS EXECUTION

Either a truism or a clarification, here I understand dramatic representation as *representation of an action in the very process of its execution*. This definition applies directly to ritual and to the Games—the shaman and the players perform the appropriate movements to *show off* certain very specific actions as they are being carried out— but indirectly to the epic performance, because the bard only gives *audible accounts* of the hero's actions. In all three cases, the action is customized, and a margin of improvisation is required for it to be fulfilled: this is proof that the action really is *currently being carried out*, and therefore that it adapts to the constraints of the moment. What matters most is the quality of the representation, and not the action's outcome: in any case, the players will complete their games, and the shaman will do all he can to obtain favorable dispositions from the spirits, and the bard to allow his hero to overcome his ordeals. It seems that it is the fact of *representing the action when it is performed* which, by its reflexive aspect, makes it possible to expect an "effect" from it, and that the quality of the representation determines the nature of this effect. This is fairly straightforward as concerns the shaman: the "presence effect" of the spirits that he generates results from his manner of showing what he does to them "*live*"—for instance, that he repels them with whiplashes or saber blows, like in Central Asia—and of how he reacts to their reactions such as he represents them. Compared to this kind of live customized interaction, what is the worth of prayers summoning invisible ancestors, prostrations before statues, or the abstract knowledge learnt in books?[12] Similarly, it is the epic performance as a sung representation

12. This is one of the reasons for which the shamans of the hunting peoples were renowned as superior to those of the pastoral peoples, who were deemed too dependent on their ancestors, and for which their rituals were seen as more effective concerning the natural environment than those of the Buddhist monks. This is also a reason for which one could, in the event of a therapeutic failure, blame the shaman without blaming shamanism, and immediately call upon another shaman, whereas faced with Buddhist medicine (in former times), or with biomedicine (nowadays),

of actions being carried out, and not the content of narration, which is credited with an "effect," for it is deemed futile to recount the epic in prose. Nor is it the hero, who is not himself perceived as liable to appear in person in the real life of humans. The hero is considered neither an ancestor, nor a spirit. He lives in a mythical world parallel to the world of humans who sing or listen to his story, a world without historical or geographical continuity with the latter. What matters is that the *progress* of his feats be sung.[13]

Dramatic representations which are not called play

The unique destiny of a particular epic, that of Geser, goes to show that other modes of representation still can have similar characteristics. It was said, at the beginning of the twentieth century, that humming a few verses of this song was enough to restore courage when lost in the forest (Hangalov 1959, II: 320); the danger enables one to do without narrative content. It was also said that one had to bring a painted portrait of this hero upon going hunting (Sharakshinova 1959: 205), or else risk horrible misfortunes if one got rid of the books telling his story.[14] It was as if something of the power assigned to this epic could take shelter in media that do not represent an action currently being carried out, but simply evoke the hero, or such and such corollary. The play vocabulary did not apply to these practices more accurately than to the epic performance, nor to the instrumental accompaniment performed by certain bards,[15] though we say that a musician "plays" his instrument: he who sings the epic is neither a player nor an actor. The manufacture of painted portraits which has accompanied Geser's recent promotion to the rank of national symbol is thus not a complete innova-

therapeutic failures tend to be blamed on academic knowledge itself; changing physicians would be useless.

13. This explains the worth of the *storytelling* method in the field of communication.

14. In 1943, in Inner Mongolia (China), Walther Heissig borrowed from a livestock breeder, in order to photograph it, the xylograph of the main Mongolian written version of the Geser epic, dated 1716, and very different from Buryat versions. But an epidemic befell his flock in the meantime, and the breeder blamed the lending, and insisted that he could not heal the cattle without taking back the xylograph (Heissig 1973: 469).

15. Seldom used by the Buryat bards, stringed instruments were widely used by Mongol bards; and they remain commonplace among the Turkic bards of Central Asia (Hamayon 1999–2000; Garrone 2000). The instrumental accompaniment is always performed by the bard himself.

tion of the post-Soviet era, but it did fail to make them the bearers of the collective ideal to be praised.

The impossibility of embodying a transcendent god

Generally speaking, the verb "to play," in Siberian languages, does not apply to the manufacture or "feeding" of animal figurines, or those of dead souls, that is, to what materializes these invisible entities, and the subsequent human actions. Play does not apply to singing invocations or making offerings either, action forms which presuppose other types of relations, thus suggesting that other types of invisible recipients are the beneficiaries. Peter Van der Veer (1992) formulated this type of opposition eloquently by titling "Playing or praying" his article about the celebration of a Sufi saint in the Islamized region of Surat, India, where Hinduism remains active. The two main brotherhoods celebrating this ceremony do it in two different ways: one plays, the other prays. Similarly, the Buryats oppose the rituals led by shamans, based on games addressed to animal spirits, to rituals led by the elders in pastoral environments, based on prayers and sacrifices directed at the ancestors. The (sung) prayers, and the sacrifices and offerings (libations and sprinklings) make the ancestors directly "present" as recipients; the scent of sacrifices and the placing of offerings before their resting places reach them in indirect and static fashion. None of these implicates them as *agents* of an action being carried out.

This difference separates the ritual for animal spirits from the ritual for ancestors, and reflects the difference in nature and in status separating these two categories of invisible entities. The hunting peoples' shaman treats the animal spirits as partners, even though, when he plays, he assumes the male position, with the initiative and advantages this comprises. In the pastoral area, the elders' attitude is, on the contrary, one of obedience and respect with regard to the ancestors, superiors who must be honored. The shaman's attitude, showing, as he shakes, that he "incorporates" his shaman ancestors, or, sighing, that he "embodies" the soul of a restless dead person—two actions in the very process of their execution—is neither play nor submission. However, in a passive way, the possessed person's attitude is placed under the sign of play. The spirit plays in his body, and expresses himself through him; the gestures and the cries of the possessed are the spirit's. And the spirit is considered the agent of the acts of whomever he possesses. This is why Gilbert Rouget ([1980] 1985, ch. 2) says this type of possession is "identificatory," and he demonstrates why it conflicts

with transcendental religions. This is the main reason why "the Games displease God," even though the dramatic dimension of play—the fact of representing imaginary beings and their actions in the very act of their doing—is not the most obvious target for the harsh words of the church fathers.

EPILOGUE: CONTEMPORARY DRAMATIZATION OF INTERACTIONS WITH INVISIBLE ENTITIES

"Dramatization" is the term used today by the Buryats of Ust'-Orda, to the west of Lake Baikal, to define one of the forms of shamanism which have developed since the end of the Soviet regime. This is the one promoted by the newly founded shaman association *Tengri*, which organizes spectacular rituals with old-fashioned costumes and drum beats. Because of this, members of another recent association, *Cahilgaan*, accuse it of "dramatizing the shamanic action." The latter claim they are more authentic, because they limit their rituals to invocations which they sing to their ancestors, and perform in sites supposed to have been wintering places of their ancestors when the latter were alive.[16] In short, they do not "play." Those of *Tengri* "play," but this is merely the reproduction of the appearance of ancient customs.

It is time to end this chapter in order to address, in the next, the question of the "effect" upon empirical reality which, in our examples, is expected of play: Where does this expectation reside? We will examine the attitude of those who participate in the Games, players and spectators, for it must be essential to this "effect" that they concur, one way or another, with its possibility, and, in particular, that they grant a form of reality to the action performed by them or before them. We will ask ourselves, among other things, to what extent the players' and spectators' agreement is due to representation, and how it varies according to the nature and quality of the representation. More precisely, what does it mean to play well, simulate well, or sing well, and who is the judge of that? Once upon a time, the answer was: the spirits.

16. Information on these two associations: Joe Long, CNRS-Groupe Sociétés Religions Laïcité (GSRL), oral communication, February 15, 2012.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Involving psyche
Joy and emotion, conscience and belief

> [. . .] the unity and indivisibility of belief and unbelief, the indissoluble connection between sacred earnest and "make-believe" or "fun," are best understood in the concept of play itself.
>
> – Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens*

> [. . .] before joining the battle, Roman generals consulted the entrails of animals sacrificed for the occasion. [. . .] It is useful for soldiers to believe in auguries, for partisans to believe in the final victory of the cause. [. . .] Perhaps it is contrary to social utility for men to admit that they do not know the future.
>
> – Raymond Aron, *Main currents in sociological thought*

We closed the previous chapter by asking ourselves what pushes those who participate in the Games, players and spectators, to expect an "effect" from them upon their realities. What validity and what reach do they give to actions that

the Games represent *in the very act of their execution*? This question, which leads to that of belief—do they believe in it, and if so, what exactly do they believe?—does not concern itself with the degree of personal involvement, which obviously varies, but rather with collective attitudes; and these will be examined in terms which express them, formalized as the Games themselves are.

In the days when the Games were intended to "rejoice" the spirits, or even "make them laugh," we could assess belief as a *shared idea* within the community. Clearly announced, this objective of rejoicing the spirits explained the Game's form, and that an "effect" could be expected of them. Nowadays, this idea has disappeared, and none of the same kind has replaced it, but the Games are still carried out with the same fear that, without them, the year will be bad. Can there be an *attitude* of belief without any true *object* of belief, without any shared ideas to root this attitude?[1] We find a first-draft answer in the Games' atmosphere. The descriptions made of them unanimously highlight their sense of elation and effervescence: joy, pleasure, excitement, and cheerfulness reign over them. Yet this joy, the most spontaneous guiding thread, is not plain sailing: though it predominates, there is always a share of pain, and blood is often spilt. More than a product of the Games, of their festive and rallying aspect, of the emotions they arouse, joy appears as a mandatory component. It is a deliberate joy, forced in a way, which strives, among other things, to compensate for the presence of pain, which is also mandatory. It expresses a form of optimism which is not presumptuous, and which is a condition of acceptance of the expectation the Games create.

JOY AND RESISTANCE TO PAIN; LAUGHTER AND APPETITE FOR RISK

Demonstrating one's joy during the Games in Siberia is as imperative a duty as that of participating in them. This goes for all the places in which this kind of public event exists. Yet many individuals confess that they force themselves to look lively, and take no pleasure in fulfilling this duty; rather they suffer, or get bored.

1. These two components are linked in the verb "to believe" such as the world religions used it, which seems to be the source of this notion's internal paradox (Hamayon 2005b, 2012b).

During the Kalash of Pakistan's celebration of the solstice, the people must dance and sing, because the spirits' and the gods' pleasure depends on the beautiful performance of dances and songs. However, it often snows. Though the ancestors claim that the effectiveness of the celebration depends on the actors' vigor, the energy expended by the largest number of participants and sometimes the bad weather transform the prospects of rejoicing into a binding duty. Furthermore, the ritual comprises a moment in which the men must laugh outrageously (Loude and Lièvre 1984: 129, 195, 197).

For the Malinke of Upper Guinea, "life is play and laughter." Thus, one must dance to summon wealth, even though dancing, being indecent, comprises a risk of shame and possession for the *manjani*, any unmarried underage woman who dances with a man. Poor dancers and poor *manjanis* are made fun of (Régine Zambon).[2]

In Siberia, skipping dances are often exhausting, and wrestling painful, but fatigue and pain are no excuse to stop. (We have seen how the Buryat shaman compels the tired dancers to get back on their feet.) To the very north, some games aim explicitly at testing in extreme fashion endurance and pain thresholds; they prepare and train in this way as well.

This goes for the Nganasan of the Taymyr Peninsula, when they "play" at pulling a stick or lifting a burden (weighing up to 32 kg) with their little finger, or even throwing a lasso with their feet (Absaliamov 1962: 81–84).

This also goes for the Inuit of Canada. A dual game consists in tugging with one's middle finger the corner of the opponent's lips. Another game—very important in the formation of a manly person, for young boys were once trained in it since infancy—consists in punching each other's temples until one is knocked out: death or severe damage can result. The winner is not necessarily the sturdiest, but the most determined. In spite of the pain, all have to remain lively and joyful. In fact, the ability to make the audience laugh is a kind of revenge for the weaker of the two (Petit 2009: 240–43, 341–44, 408–11, and passim).

The sight of a player's pain does not seem to hinder the spectator's joy. Tertullian, at the beginning of the Common Era, wondered how the same man who shudders at the sight of blood spilling from a lacerated body can clap when the blood belongs to a gladiator: this blood "rejoices" the divine spectators of the Circus Games. Without requiring that blood be spilt, our Games include in

2. Presentation at the workshop "La danse comme objet anthropologique," CNRS-Ivry, April 2007.

their spectrum the idea of human death. Indispensable to a balanced relationship between humans and the nurturing world, this dark side is often part of the same ritual whole as the light side, thus becoming suffused with the joyful atmosphere. In all cases, nothing—not effort, not pain, not even the prospect of blood being spilt or death befalling a participant—nothing must dent the general good humor. This is a general assessment: Games of this type unfold in a spirit of laughter, gaiety, and joking, even for the losers, or for those in pain. Besides, "laughter" forms a set phrase with "to play" in Mongolian: *ineeh naadah*.

Laughter as ritualization of aggressiveness

The insistence on the obligation to laugh during collective Games draws our attention all the more, because a fair number of the games played are painful. Being conventional in this frame, laughter is unavoidably exploited. This is what is shown by historian Georges Minois' overview of the many types of laughter that have succeeded one another in the West for over two millennia.

Minois retraces the place of laughter in ancient Greece. For Homer, laughter was a sign of triumph over an enemy, and therefore a tool both for cohesion and for exclusion (Minois 2000: 35). After Plato, Aristotle tries to humanize laughter. The famous sentence "*laughter* is the *property* of *man*" is often attributed to him, although, as Minois specifies, what he actually said was that "man is the only animal that *laughs*," or that "no animal but man ever laughs." But little by little, law and religion avoid laughter, which tends to assume a diabolical tint; thus, pagan thought laid the ground for the Christian rejection of laughter (ibid.: 60–63). In the Middle Ages, because it accepts its fundamental values, society can mock itself; its parodic games, far from dissenting, reinforce values and hierarchies by ritual inversion (ch. V). All in all, whereas ancient laughter was serious and vigorous, modern laughter only masks the loss of meaning (ibid.: 584).

According to the main naturalist, zoological, and psychophysiological approaches, as summarized by Minois in chapter XIV, laughter is a spontaneous reaction of self-defense by distancing. Corresponding behaviors exist among animals, for instance, when they show their teeth. According to Konrad Lorenz ([1963] 1966), laughter must be understood as a ritualized form of diversion of aggressiveness by the distance it creates with its object: ritualization provides an outlet for aggressiveness. Therefore, depending on the circumstances, laughter absolves one from pain, anguish, or energy. Since it increases the production of endorphins, its

therapeutic value is acknowledged. Darwin had already deduced from his research on the facial expressions of monkeys the idea that prehistoric humans laughed to indicate the lack of danger, and to disarm enemies. Therefore, even though the laughter we experience is spontaneous, its intrinsically ritualized feature, naturalists point out, could help to explain the duty to laugh during the Games.

DEMONSTRATING JOY, FEELING DESIRE: A CULTURAL TRADITION

It goes without saying that the mere fact of getting together has a part not only in the effervescence so important to Durkheim, but also in everything that goes with this, and which is covered by Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* regarding the atmosphere created by ritual in tribal-type societies: friendliness, eradication of differences, resolution of conflicts, and redefinition of interpersonal relations. But, on the one hand, friendliness and redefinition of interpersonal relations are not specific to rituals. In the areas we consider, they also characterize hospitality, which requires slaughtering a sheep in order to treat the guest, a ritualized situation which does not, in itself, constitute a ritual. In modern industrial societies, it rather characterizes leisure contexts intentionally purged of all ritual convention. On the other hand, the emotion fostered by a situation of *communitas* does not necessarily burst out in the form of joy, and the rivalries which can arise from competitive games do not necessarily turn into general solidarity. Violent quarrels can break out, especially if alcohol is present. Such can be the case among contemporary Mongols and Buryats, for whom drinking is part of the game, a song accompanying a drink; yet, however violent, these drinking sprees retain a conventional aspect.[3] Hence, the concept of *communitas* is not enough to explain how the Games' atmosphere is specifically *joyful*. Only pleasant and mocking words are exchanged, whereas sacrificial rituals, which in principle also generate an atmosphere permeated with *communitas*, tend to resonate instead with woeful lamentations.[4]

3. This is what Grégory Delaplace (2009) notes about the expression of emotions during drinking sessions in Mongolia. So do Tatiana Safonova and Istvan Sántha (2010) about drinking games among the Evenk in Buryatia.

4. Like these excerpts of Buryat invocations to the ancestors in pastoral environments: "Protect our horses from thieves and wolves! [. . .] Before us be watchmen, behind us be shadows, stop the dogs from biting us, and the bad from

In our Games, joy is less the expression of spontaneous emotions than the result of a true cultural infusion, which falls within the subject's deepest experience from childhood; it is the subject of such total consensus that it is not shattered by negative experiences. For the Yakut author Ergis (1974: 313), the hunting lifestyle imposes joy. The hunters spend their nights in the forest, under the stars near a bonfire in summer, in a hut in winter, at the risk of being devoured. But their songs are never sad. They never complain, because they always hope for spoils. The whole camp expresses their joy to the lucky hunter upon his return; not doing so would be a true repudiation with huge consequences. No criticism befalls the hunter who returns empty-handed. Ergis also opposes the hunter's mindset to that which prevails in pastoral environments.[5] Moreover, the breeder does not laugh when he slaughters cattle, while the hunter laughs and jumps upon seeing an animal cornered by the trap he has set. The spirit who has bestowed game upon the hunter likes to see him celebrate with him, the Yakuts once claimed (Ionov 1916: 5). Everywhere in Siberia, idleness is teased, and failure to refrain from complaining or boasting despised. Joy and optimism go hand in hand with moderation and humbleness.

In order to describe his quarry, the hunter downplays its size, and sometimes belittles its nature. If he has shot a reindeer, he will talk about a musk deer, spread his arms barely half a meter wide, and pretend to carry a very heavy and very large weight (Hudiakov [1866] 1969: 219–20).[6] More broadly, the hunter is as cautious and modest as anyone who feels he is lucky, and that this luck is fragile. He never forgets that his catch is merely the moment of an exchange, which must one day be compensated for by his death, or the death of his kin: hence, he makes sure that he does not take more than can be eaten, avoiding all excess and potential waste. In front of the other hunters, he also abstains from

harming us!" (Baldaev 1975b: 171, 174). The general atmosphere thus differs from that of the Games, although one plays and feasts during these sacrificial rites just as much.

5. "May woes not strike you, misfortunes pass without stopping, the tears of sorrow not approach you, and illness not cling to you," a Yakut blessing says to the newlyweds—a blessing which ends by wishing them happiness, luck, children, and cattle (Ergis 1974: 179–80).

6. In France, even today, it is customary for hunters to say pig and not boar, and chicken and not pheasant when they relate their catches. This depreciation plays a role analogous to that of the ritual swearwords uttered, in many societies, to ward off ill fortune (e.g., Cohen 1960).

boasting, for success one day can turn into failure the next. There is a general life insurance in the duty of each to share his game. He who feeds the other one day will be fed by the other the next. The hunter's attitude resembles the wrestler's, who, likewise, never complains nor boasts. Both display the same sense of *fair play* if they lose. The reason lies not only in the fact that, as I have already pointed out (ch. 9), the roles of winner and loser are reversible, and that the aim is not to establish a power relationship between them, given that they are members of the same group, and wrestle *together* with a common interest.[7] It also is a fact of culture. Moderation and modesty are both conventional expressions of an ethics that combines a will for optimism and a solidarity bias. As deliberate as joy, they are not artificial either. These are ethics that everyone, among the hunting peoples, internalizes from childhood.

The joy displayed ostentatiously during the Games also aims at fostering another feeling: desire. Desire to go hunting, parallel to the desire to love that the sensual stories told during the nocturnal vigil must arouse in the hunters' dreams. In this regard, the Russian language is especially explicit. For "to hunt," it uses the reflexive verb *ohotit'sia*, derived from the term *ohota*, which designates hunting, want, desire, and pleasure all at the same time. Following this etymology, hunting is analyzed as "enjoyment," and is interpreted as "running after something one desires," as if pursuing a desire was important in itself, regardless of its fulfillment. Empty-handed one day, the hunter sets off the next.

ETHICS BASED ON DELIBERATE OPTIMISM

Notwithstanding the abandonment of the hunting lifestyle, the Games remain iconic regarding these ethics and the associated feelings. These ethics generate an attitude felt as favoring a positive shaping of the future, which also expresses itself in the language. Mongols and Buryats widely use optative (may you, may she) and voluntative (may I) verbal suffixes, which incorporate optimism and voluntarism in the morphology. Their languages do not have a future tense, but rather a "potential" which makes the future conceivable, though not certain. Other languages call upon desire or will to refer to the future. And voluntarism, which associates optimism and ostentatious joy, is shared by other societies.

7. Even the epic hero, who is *the* hero, punctuates his combats with: "I defeated a great enemy, but I must not boast."

For instance, it emanates implicitly from this Portuguese saying: *tristezas não pagam dívidas*, "sadness does not pay debts." This implies that, in order to overcome one's hardships, one must not give in to despondency.[8] An Inuit proverb goes one step further: "Those who know how to play can easily leap over the adversities of life. And one who can sing and laugh never brews mischief."[9] In Siberia, joy expresses, beyond optimism, voluntarism, which fosters an appetite for risk. More than testing one's strength, it is a question of increasing one's "vital strength," "luck," or "energy," a kind of intangible capital, which any individual possesses, and which determines his or her life. "Playing" supports and maintains this capital, restores it when it is weak, and helps to develop it. Many practices take over the Games' role in daily life in order to cultivate these ethics.

"It is useful [. . .] to believe in [. . .] victory," Raymond Aron says ([1967] 1999: 126). However, something must support this belief. To be lively and optimistic, is it enough to be compelled to be so? Regarding the possible bases of this optimism, let us start by questioning the former Games, or rather the shamanic ritual which was attached to them, because it also unraveled a worldview at the same time, which sheds light upon their form and content. This ritual used to show the "playing" partner in his best light; it only extolled the rewarding and glorious moments of his "wife taking" and "game (hunting luck) catching," keeping silent the moment in which he accepts future human losses. It accorded humans the privilege of the *active* partner in their alliance with edible wild species. Yet the idea that it is positive to be the one playing remains well entrenched.

BELIEF, EMOTION, AND CONSCIOUSNESS: "ENTERING THE GAME"

It would be naïve to claim that the Siberian peoples who performed this ritual at the beginning of the twentieth century actually "believed" that the shaman *married* a female spirit, that the reindeer hairs he obtained from her *were* game promises, and that by the end of the ritual he *offered*—through his flesh to be devoured and his blood to be sucked—his own vital strength as a token for future deaths among the humans, in order to satiate the wild world. But it

8. Joana Martins, oral communication, 2001.

9. Rasmussen (1929: 244), quoted by Laugrand and Oosten (2007–8: 464).

would nonetheless be false to think that these peoples took these representations lightly, for they enabled them to think and live the hunting lifestyle. To them, these representations were conceivable, because they presented their relationship to the world in the terms of relations which were well known to them. They were staged in the ritual in the form of interactions unfolding in ways beneficial to humans. All these representations showed the hunter that the shaman, by "getting married" in this context, concluded an agreement of a different kind, allowing one to hunt in daily life. The shaman "played the game" (insofar as it appears impossible to play a role while being cynical about it).[10] And the hunter "entered the game" for the duration of the ritual, and then went hunting. Our question, here, is not whether the hunters believed in it or not. Besides, the answer would be close to Paul Veyne's ([1983] 1988) regarding ancient Greece: the Greeks most likely believed *the* myths they heard since childhood, but without believing *in* the heroic gods whose stories these myths told. For his part, Rodney Needham (1972), for whom the "inner state" of "believers" is by definition inaccessible to observers, stuck to the external manifestations of their "beliefs," to their acts of faith.

It is also with regard to the acts which accompany them, or which follow them, that I shall speak here of representations, that is to say, of ideas held as valid in the imaginary world created by the Games and the shamanic ritual. The creation of this world performs well the function Walton (1990: 92–93) assigns to works of fiction: "prescribing acts of imagination." By the very fact of participating in them, our hunter accepted to imagine this world. In this respect, he did as the other members of his group, and shared the same ideas as them: these were the ideas that had enabled their people to survive until now; they had their justification within this fictional world, without any need for external justification. And thus their adherence to this vision, or common "imagination" of a world in which their shaman could act, was in no way artificial, nor was the associated burst of joy. The latter was not only to do with the fact that each individual was held responsible before everyone else for his or her contribution to the whole, and encouraged to monitor his or her neighbor, to support the shaman, and to encourage general enthusiasm; it also expressed a specific type of emotion we have all experienced in books or movies: numerous readers or spectators say they have "suffered" with such or such a character, or "exulted"

10. Robert Crépeau (1997) rightfully rejects all allegations of skepticism and cynicism concerning Amerindian shamans.

with another. In short, they have "entered" the book or movie, without, however, believing that the characters with whom they sympathize have a real existence outside this book or movie. But if they have "entered" it, it is thanks to the book or the film's ability to secure the readers' or the spectators' support for the fictional world they had created.

The shaman's worth was measured relative to the same kind of ability. He had to play in order to make the hunters "enter the game" of the ritual, and the latter had to grant him full discharge of his action at the end of the ritual. This was far from being a formality, and the hunters frequently asked the shaman to start over his intervention with the spirits of wild species in order to obtain more. Rather, this meant releasing the shaman, who had performed what was expected of him in the imaginary world of the ritual, according to his duty, and making the hunters enter the world of empirical reality. Henceforth, it was impossible for them not to go hunting, lest the benefits of preparation backfire, for everything had been done to make the hunt possible and fruitful.

Considered from the angle of belief, "entering the game" looks at all aspects of the problem of state of mind and consciousness evoked above (ch. 1). For Pariset and Albertini, playing requires both "entering the game" and not getting "caught up in the game": the player consciously enters the game but is never fooled by his game, otherwise he stops playing (1980: 26). This position, which is most likely explained by the authors' perspective of initiation in economics, differs from the mainstream position in studies about play, which remain rather true to Huizinga on this point. For Huizinga, indeed, "Whether one is sorcerer or sorcerized" (and this goes for the player, the seer, and the gambler), "he is always knower and dupe at once," [but he] "chooses to be the dupe" ([1938] 1949: 23). The author's reasoning foreshadows Mannoni's ([1964] 2003): "I know well, but all the same," also based on the remark that, during a secret society ritual, the women writhe, fearful, when the masks come near them, even though they know full well who bears them.[11] Caillois expresses a similar idea about the actor who tries to make the character he plays exist on stage, but refuses

11. "R. R. Marett, in his chapter on 'Primitive credulity' in *The threshold of religion*, develops the idea that a certain element of 'make-believe' is operative in all primitive religions. [. . .] They know perfectly well who is hiding behind this mask or that. All the same, they get fearfully excited when a mask comes up to them with minatory gestures, and flee shrieking in all directions. These expressions of terror, says Jensen, are in part quite genuine and spontaneous, and in part only acting up to a part imposed by tradition" (Mannoni [1964] 2003: 74).

to impersonate him once his costume is removed: believing the "reality of his role" would be a mark of "alienation."[12] Furthermore, Caillois also says that the underlying intent of all that falls under his category of *mimicry*[13] is not "that of deceiving the spectators [. . .] only the spy and the fugitive disguise themselves to really deceive because they are not playing" ([1958] 1961: 21).

Perhaps we could say then that *mimicry* is conscious because of the very fact that it implies a reluctance to deceive. In a way, playing would force one to be conscious. For his part, Duflo (1997: 218–19) considers that "individual consciousness [is] duplicated" because of the fact that "playing generates, in our reality, another reality," and that this duplication is a feature of consciousness. This position is close to Jean-Marie Schaeffer's (1999: 179 and passim), for whom immersion in a fictional world creates a "biplanar" state of mind, consisting in "entering" fiction, knowing that it is a lure.

My own point of view is pretty similar. Hunters expect from their shaman that he create a fictional world making the hunt possible, and are thus aware of the manner in which he does it. Furthermore, we can say that their degree of consciousness of this fictional feature varies according to how well he plays, and their adherence to this fictional world depends on the shaman's ability to produce an "effect of reality." Generally speaking, participating in a game necessarily triggers a process of construction of the consciousness of playing. Given that play establishes itself as a specific domain, and that it is not blind to the fact that it is "play," it calls upon an equally specific perception, which builds itself as such as experience grows. An external interruption is sometimes needed for the subject to realize that he or she was playing.

But this does not exempt us from wondering about the basis for the expectation of an "effect" of play on reality. What of the hunter who sets off to hunt immediately following a ritual during which his group's shaman has obtained "luck"? It is significant that, more often than not, the empty-handed hunter blames the lack of game on the shaman who performed the ritual, but that, most often too, the lucky hunter considers abundance to be the fruit of his own

12. "The corruption of mimicry [. . .] is produced when simulation is no longer accepted as such [. . .]. [The player] no longer plays another. Persuaded that he is the other, he behaves as if he were, forgetting his own self. The loss of his real identity [. . .] is properly called alienation" (Caillois [1958] 1961: 49).

13. "[. . .] the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself. He forgets, disguises, or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another" (Caillois [1958] 1961: 21).

personal know-how and luck, as much as the validity of his shaman's action. Besides, he will have shot the first animal encountered, and there is no reason to believe that he will have cared about its species' spirit: no rite is scheduled, other than those performed on the animal's body. He has probably relied on the shaman's ritual action more than he has believed in the fictional world it implies, and to which one must adhere during the ritual. For it really is to this action's quality that the effect expected upon hunting's reality is attributed.

The relation between belief and object of belief

The nature of the "effect" expected of the ancient Games derives directly from the meaning that the imitated animal movements have in reality. This is not so for the types of game carried out in the frame of the Games nowadays in Mongolia and Buryatia, the aim of which is not success in hunting. The dance type has disappeared, and the wrestling type has been transformed; and it is unlikely that anyone could say what the different contests that have replaced them refer to. However, these Games provoke an attitude of entry into the game, and the expectation of an effect, that is to say, an adherence or even an attitude of belief, even though it is based on no content or concrete reference. How can we account for that?

On the attitude of belief without object of belief

The example of a private practice widespread in Eastern Asia illustrates the mechanism from which stems, if not an attitude of belief, then at least a commitment to act without any genuine content as a base, namely an entry into the game. This practice consists in throwing an asymmetrical object in the air, and seeing in the way it falls to the ground a sign, to be interpreted in a positive or negative fashion. Usually called divinatory, it triggers a form of deliberate optimism. Present in all kinds of contexts, it cannot be attributed to any one religion, nor to a diffuse form of animism.[14] Whereas, in the Chinese world, anybody can perform this on their own, in Mongolia and in Siberia this practice requires, now as before, the intervention of a shaman who "throws" to the

14. During the Korean New Year, people throw asymmetrical objects into the air and make predictions based on which side they fall on.

benefit of clients.[15] This throw calls up no specific representation, no spirit; it is not mindlessly joyful, and in fact it instills a mood of anxious expectation. As far as I know, the vocabulary of "play" is not used with regard to it.[16] Being dissymmetrical, the object thrown has a "good" and a "bad" side. The good side is the one which makes of it (drumstick, spoon, bowl) a container liable to receive what would fall into it; therefore, it is its concave, open, side which must be turned upward. The sign generated by how it falls to earth, good or bad, does not serve as a medium to "guess" or "predict." The object is thrown and thrown again, either an unlimited number of times during a single ritual until it falls on the good side, or a limited number of times, but thrown again, once more, during a resumption of the ritual or an alternative ritual, in order to generate a positive sign, or to confirm a first positive outcome. The positive outcome has a performative aspect in itself; it is credited with a positive effect that those for whom the object has been thrown must take advantage of, failing which, they will miss out on a favorable opportunity, and, in particular, draw misfortune to themselves. What is striking is that, in order to throw the object, the shaman wears a blindfold, or has the fringes of his headgear flapped over his eyes: he is prevented from seeing how the object falls. Those affected must say out loud whether the objects falls on the right side: in Evenk language, "taken" (or "returned" otherwise) (Bulatova, 1994: 170); in Buryat and in Mongolian, "luck," *tööreg~töörög* (or "no luck," *tööreggüi~tööröggüi*) (Merli 2010). The shaman is thus partly absolved of responsibility, which falls to those concerned: shouting the result allows them to have the throw repeated if it is negative, or make it valid and effective if it is positive. Far from being a formality, yelling "luck" or another customary formula means acknowledging a favorable sign, and, more importantly, unleashing a commitment to act and a positive expectation, even though this is not specified. It is an act of belief without content of belief. The shaman, before throwing the object, may have summoned some spirits, but nothing indicates that his throw is addressed to one of them, or relates to a precise issue. At most, he will say *a posteriori* that its fall brings the answer of such and such a spirit to such and such a question as he would have devised without expressing it. No one claims that a spirit has

15. This passage summarizes the data studied in Hamayon (2012b).

16. It is said that a Darhad shaman (an ethnic group of northwestern Mongolia) shouted *igra*, "play" in Russian, upon throwing his drumstick at each person present onsite.

guided the shaman's arm, or the object's trajectory; if the outcome is positive, the shaman will be said *mergen*, a "skillful shooter, who aims straight." But no one deems that the object falls at random either. For all involved, the way it falls is intentional, even though nobody tries to identify the source of this intentionality. According to Cohen (1960), Socrates did not think that the spell was an instrument of the gods' speech either.

It may seem strange to attribute a positive outcome to an agent, and to leave this agent indeterminate. Nevertheless, it is effective. A positive fall opens up a broad range of speculations and manipulations to those concerned. It encourages them to commit with the hope of support, without imposing constraints upon them, because this support is not identified. It gives them the right tools to take responsibility, or even risks, while exempting them from reporting to anyone else than themselves. They must act, but remain free to choose when and how, without having to say it publicly, though with the insecurity this comprises.[17] Distinctive of some situations of deprivation, this is one particular aspect of a more general tendency to recognize some events of daily life as unique, and to make them hints on which to rely in order to take decisions or direct one's action. While, in all societies, some signs are interpreted according to convention, others become signs only because some chose to identify them as such.[18] Indeterminacy shows itself here to be the driving force of speculative dynamics. Along with the blurring of categories, it is part of the characteristics that make the psychic's consultation a "play space half real-half fictitious," as Marc-Antoine Berthod (2007) remarks about psychics in French-speaking Switzerland.

Indeterminacy will be considered from another standpoint in the next chapter. As to its provocative aspect, let us now say that it may not be so strange to leave the potential agent of such a favor in the dark. Would it be more accurate for us to say where our "luck" originates from, to whom, or to what we owe it? In the case of the drumstick, the mere fact of repeating the throw until it falls on the right side is a manifestation of the conviction that human tenacity will prevail over any agent, whatever it may be. This is the opposite approach to that which, in classical antiquity, took the form of asking soothsayers to make "the

17. This indeterminacy bias distinguishes the throw from the reassuring and constraining divinatory methods of the ancient Mediterranean world, which set out auspicious and harmful categories. It recalls some requirements of the messianic announcement, which must remain undetermined, and express itself not in clear and concrete terms, but in evasive and fictitious terms (Scholem [1971] 1995).

18. I investigated this matter in Hamayon (2014).

will of the gods known"; it is also contrary to all the forms of divination which, under the pretext of "obtaining answers" on behalf of invisible beings, set causality categories and impose norms.

Shouting "luck" after a throw means claiming the possibility to use a favor, and "investing confidence," if not self-confidence, then at least confidence in something that has to do with the person, and is external to him or her. Psyche is all the more called upon that the supposed external source of luck is left undetermined. This gives throwing the appearance of a process to teach responsibility and will, as a triggering component of anticipation or positive "subjective probability," according to Cohen and Hansel's (1956) expression. We can also call it a triggering component of adherence to the validity of the positive sign generated by the throw, and therefore of a commitment to act *without any true content of belief*. A dynamic occurrence is sparked by the fact that the material phenomenon—the object's fall—leads to a cultural interpretation, which makes it *the sign of something else*.

Interpreting something as leading to something else: here is a functional trait which likens the process implied in "play" to that which characterizes metaphorization, a common point I will discuss at the end of this book. All it takes is for the fall to be held as something more than a mere material phenomenon to spark the potentiality of an intentional source encouraging one to take full advantage of it. Anyone left indifferent would be mocked. There is no other choice than to commit. And this commitment seems all the more potent for the fact that nothing specific, if not the object falling right side up, justifies it. No one tries to demonstrate its validity if it succeeds, nor will anyone complain if nothing positive comes of it (and besides, indeterminacy allows recourse to all possible reasons to explain failure). All involved agree that things would have been worse without the initial throw.

OPTIMISM AND MOVEMENT

The public Games do not have a monopoly on arousing joy and commitment. A positive "effect" is also attributed to games played in private. These are experienced with pleasure without being the object of a "duty of joy." They have no pain to compensate, nor any norm to impose, and that means that the joy surrounding them seems to stem from the natural pleasure of playing, while being, as in the public Games, felt as the seed of a vital spark.

Most of the Mongol games, private or public, have a propitiatory aspect, Iwona Kabzinska-Stawacz notes (1991). Their outcome constitutes a warning sign, even though they do not aim at signifying anything. They are governed by seasonal prescriptions, the transgression of which would be attested to by trouble in the natural order of things: played in the wrong season, the nomads say, such a game will make the wolves come and thunder sound, while, in the right season, it will make grass grow and increase the mares' milk. All these games include the performance of gestures, with or without a tangible medium: "bringing the fingers out," wrestling, racing, jacks, checkers, stone throws, "breaking the bones," etc.

What these private games have in common with the public Games are features of form and function: they are based on movement, and are supposed to act upon natural phenomena. This goes for certain practices which, without being themselves called games, belong to the same field.

> In the 1970s, when drought would strike the Mongolian steppes, the Mongols would still send young boys out, alone, to practice wrestling on the hilltops, with the hope that this would make the rain fall. It was said that they set out to wrestle, not "to play." (Fieldwork notes R.H.)

It is not only in our examples that an "effect" is attributed to physical Games. Our media tell us that a soccer game provides some peoples in Africa with the ideal opportunity to cast spells, and that winning an international final reinvigorates or cuts short a bad streak. On the eve of the soccer World Cup final in July 2010, the TV news showed exhilarated Spanish fans shouting: "The crisis is over!" Seen in this light, the presentation of the divinatory throw would support this point: for it to have an optimistic effect, even though it is not a game and does not cause laughter, *movement* was first needed, the shaman's gesture initiated a *distance*, in which I am tempted to find some sort of echo of the distance between the field of his act and the field of reality in which its "effect" is expected.

Movement and distance: these two elements will matter, in the next chapters, as we seek to understand all the motivations of the positive expectation created by play, and the part it plays in its preparatory function. But before that, a few more words on the sources and paths of this expectation.

THE JOY OF PLAYING AND PREPARATION OF THE FUTURE

Propitiation and conjuration—which is the other side of the same coin—resurfaced in Siberia and Mongolia as soon as the Soviet regime, which had belittled them, collapsed. Nowadays, people conspicuously try to attract happiness and shun misfortune using a wide range of techniques, from hanging ribbons on tree branches, to astrology, or *feng shui* (Delaplace 2005-6; Merli 2010). In the Soviet era, during which opportunities for feasting (in order to replace prohibited ancient rituals) multiplied, toasting played a public role of support for the Buryats: all, or almost all, guests had to propose a toast, and turn their glass three times before raising it to their lips. They had to cry out *boltogoi*, "so be it!," after each toast. Without this gesture and without this word, the toast would not have inspired the confidence and optimism hoped for. To not do it could have been seen as a mark of hostility, and a bad omen.

Altogether, joy and commitment assert the preparatory aspect of "play" in a new—psychological—perspective: playing prepares one to anticipate the future positively, as Céline Petit says (2009). If this is so, it means that the preparatory "effect" expected of the Games is never felt to be certain. This random trait of the Games' "effect" separates them from liturgical rituals, typical of instituted religions defined by the Catholic formula *ex opere operato*.[19] It is precisely uncertainty regarding the Games' effect which pushes one to anticipate—through joy—their positive aspect; in this sense, playing appears to be a gamble on a happy assumption. Möllering subtly shows how accepting a happy assumption as likely makes positive social interactions liable to have great potential benefits, and above all musters the will to favor its realization, even if only to avoid having to prove oneself wrong for having had this positive expectation. In the author's words, "trust is more than a probabilistic investment decision under risk," it is a "leap of faith"; it is "not about avoiding [one's own] vulnerability but about positively accepting it," "irrespective of whether the trustor is conscious of this." It is also calling upon "trust's compulsory power," as Georg Simmel already highlighted. "Trust is an ongoing process of building on reason, routine and reflexiv-

19. This formula, which comes from Catholic theology, means that the ritual act works on its own if it is performed according to predetermined rules. It does not aim at having a direct "effect" upon immediate empirical reality. It aims at shunning the harmful "effects" which the noncompletion of these ritual acts would necessarily have. By the negative formulation (become mainstream) of their "effect," the contemporary Buryat and Mongol Games tend to get closer to them.

ity, suspending irreducible social vulnerability and uncertainty *as if* they were favorably resolved (idealizing can be performative), an *as if* both powerful and fragile." Even though we are bound to deceive ourselves, for better or for worse, because we hold positive expectations in spite of an irreducible uncertainty, trust encourages us to confirm these expectations. Thus, "trust may reduce the threat of deception": ultimately, "trust and deception do not always work against each other but can complement each other in creating and maintaining a common understanding of social reality" (Möllering 2008: 7–9, 15–19). This uncertainty, internal to play, creates a critical point at the heart of the act of playing.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Indeterminacy
Luck

> Fortune [. . .] seeks out the bravest for her opponents, and passes over some with contempt.
>
> – Seneca, *On providence*

> Fortune favors the prepared mind.
>
> – Louis Pasteur

Indeterminacy and luck will be approached here only in light of playing, since they have been explored from other perspectives in previous works (the conclusion of my 1990 book was titled "Handling contingency"), and a synthetic book is in preparation. For this reason, this chapter will refer only incidentally to the two volumes edited by Giovanni da Col and Caroline Humphrey on Cosmologies of fortune *(2012, the same year as the French edition of this book), to which I contributed an analysis of "luck as a relational process."*

The Games demand jubilation in order to "prepare," even though they may cause people to suffer. This preparatory "effect" is uncertain, because what has been prepared has not yet taken place. It is possible to influence the upcoming realities owing to the fact of their indeterminacy. And "playing" is an adequate mode of

action in two essential characteristics: being preparatory, it refers to a temporality that has not yet come; and being based on the negation of its own meaning (ch. 3), it is deprived of "effect" in the frame in which it unfolds, and thus liable to generating an "effect" in an *elsewhere*, which cannot be determined in advance. Inherently dynamic, "play" allows the player flexibility in the form of a genuine plurality of choices at each step, even though the overall framework is agreed upon.

This triple uncertainty can explain the power assigned to play. But this power of influence over the undetermined is not specific to play: it is the purpose of many ritual, religious, or symbolic practices. In order to grasp the specificity of play with regard to this aspect, we must first of all ask ourselves if all that is "to come" has to be "prepared." We do not imagine beforehand that we must take action to make sure that night follows day, or that the sun rises in the east the next morning. However, many centuries ago, Egyptians and Aztecs tried to do so. Are there any meaningful common points, within our baseline examples, that can stimulate "play"?

THE PRAGMATIC STAKE OF PREPARATORY "PLAY"

In our examples, playing aims at *acting upon* what must happen *here and now*, upon the upcoming hunting season in the nearby woods, upon the weeks to be spent in the hut or yurt that is about to be assembled. What is at stake is close to hand. However, this proximity is never taken advantage of to check *ex post* if the expected "effect" has indeed occurred: there will always be some reason to explain failure, and failure will never prevent one from playing once more. "We do not grow tired of the bow because we have returned empty-handed from hunting," a Mongolian proverb says. The performative function of play is not of the causal type, nor is the expected "effect" of the temporal type. While play indeed aims at influencing what has not yet come, the undetermined upon which play is supposed to have an influence is not the future itself.

"UNPRODUCIBILITY": INDETERMINACY FACTOR PAR EXCELLENCE

The superlative example of indeterminacy is the accessibility of wild game, according to our baseline example, as it looks at the issue from all sides. The

Games' main role is to stimulate wildlife reproduction, and the shamanic ritual's is to establish a right to hunt, and obtain "luck" for the hunters. The Evenk clearly merge luck and game during their rituals: the shaman hunts for luck as he would hunt for game. One of these rituals is called *sinkelevun*, "fetching luck (*sinken*)," and the round dance performed during the ritual *sinkele-*.[1] The term *sinken~hinken* designates at the same time the abstract concept of luck, the reindeer hair which represents it during the ritual, and the amulets which aim at attracting or preserving it throughout the season.[2] It sometimes applies to the silence of the forest, or to a game species' spirit.[3] This type of ritual presents luck as an immaterial good making it possible for hunters to really and harmlessly take game. This is the hunter's core ambition, for he knows it is impossible to decide where and when game will appear, and if it will come in large numbers.

If this is the case, it is because game is a good which cannot be foreshadowed or measured, given that it cannot be "produced" (*generated*) by a human activity. For Siberian peoples, indeterminacy is not inherent to this type of good, but it is implied by the fact that using techniques and applying rules, crucial as they may be, are not enough to obtain game; for that, an immaterial good called luck is required, which is also "unproducible." "*Unproducibility*" means that game—concretely—and luck—in the abstract—come in *limited amounts*: there cannot be enough for everyone all the time. Luck thus seems to be a *selective* feature of the good obtained, and of the one who managed to obtain it.

Buryat herdsmen extend this *unproducibility* to hunting as a whole, and root their rejection of this lifestyle in this. They blame its "inextensibility," *huna-bargüi*. In contrast, they say that a few grams of lactic ferment are enough to make liters of dairy. In Mongolia, this led the term "ferment," *höröngö*, to be chosen to designate "capital" when Marxism entered their history. It also led to inextensible fields of activity to be disapproved of by the upholders of ideologies advocating productive activities as a source of continual progress, and to the opposition, in terms of values, of luck to work, and to merit. But, conversely, this also led to *unproducibility* recovering some relevance in a free-market context,

1. Anisimov (1958: 15); Vasilevich (1969: 229); Mazin (1984: 27); Hamayon (1990a: 555–60); Lavrillier (2005).
2. An amulet can be manufactured with a portion of the snout, or with any other organ regarded as the seat of the soul.
3. For the Nabesna of Alaska, the term *ink'on* encompasses the following meanings: "shamanic power," "medicine," "luck (without which survival is impossible)" (Guédon 2005: 111, 127).

when the myth of continual progress collapsed, and awareness of the finiteness of resources increased . . .

We could also say that, for the Buryats, and those in the neighboring societies, all the activities that must be "prepared" by one way of "playing" or the other relate to fields marked with a comparable factor of *unproducibility*. They share a common trait: they consist of something beyond human control, which, like game and luck, is considered eminently variable, and thought of not on an all-or-nothing basis, but on an enough-or-not-enough, better-or-worse, more-or- less basis. This explains why Game as in "amusement" or "contest with rules" is countable, whereas game as in "wild game" is uncountable.[4] Many languages possess specific forms for what is evaluated in this way and cannot be numbered: game, luck, rain, energy, success, happiness, love, etc. This usually goes also for their derivative negative equivalents: bad luck, misfortune. There can be no census of what is uncountable. The uncountable aspect of game has to do with the hunters' and hunting's reputation for being beyond regulatory control.

LUCK: LEADER OF A SEMANTIC SERIES

The vernacular terms are so numerous and variable that I choose, for now, to examine luck only, giving this word a generic scope embracing the whole series, which also includes fortune and grace, and overlaps with fate and destiny.[5] Some Mongol and Buryat terms change meaning from one period or context to the next, whereas the rest of the vocabulary is rather stable.[6] But some nuances will emerge as my approach unfolds, leading me to call upon other terms. These form a semantic series pertaining to a marginal fringe where politics and

4. The slang expression "got game" also considers game as uncountable: it means being resourceful, or having skill and ability, particularly with regard to courting (Damien Simon).

5. Giovanni da Col (2012) uses "fortune" as the English notion, which better encompasses the whole range of terms found in the semantic series dealt with here, as in his coedited volume (da Col and Humphrey 2012a).

6. In Mongol medieval sources, the word for "fortune" was *suu* (Bazin 1987; Dmitriev 2010). In Kowalewski's dictionary (1844–49: 1377a), *suu* means "distinction, superiority, majesty, excellence." It is only found nowadays in derivatives: *sülde* "spiritual, psychic or vital force, charisma"; *süns* "soul"; *sür* "power, greatness, strength" (Buryat *hülde, hünehe, hür*, respectively).

religion meet, and are inseparable from the projection of these over time. Here, we call on luck to lead the way, since it is the notion associated with the hunting lifestyle, where uncertainty is strongest, and the human grip on the world is the weakest. Therefore, compared with other notions in the series, luck demands the most of humans—it is to be *earned* off the back of material and immaterial partners—while others, such as "grace," are to be implored from superior immaterial entities.

It is of note that this notion remains relevant to us nowadays (especially in politics), and that providence, which I suggest placing at the other end of the series, has had a similar lifespan. Providence is present in the Bible alongside God, and still is, in the French political ideal, alongside the state.[7] At the time this ideal was formed, luck entered the French juridical field in negative fashion:

> The notion of "perte de chance" (loss of opportunity) is created by French case law at the end of the nineteenth century. The victims are compensated for the opportunities they have missed and not for the benefits these would have created had they been realized: this goes for the prospect of not losing a horse race, not failing an exam, not recovering from illness, etc. (Carvais 2006: 14, 20)[8]

This integration of luck into the law comes across as a socialization of misfortune. At first, this integration seems contrary to economic interests, but useful from a social perspective (even though the aim of law is not to rectify "acts of fate," and the corollary of freedom is responsibility). This is why, according to the jurist Carbonnier, in the collective games that our state of well-being has instituted, where everyone plays against everyone else, like a faceless multitude, it is as if, with regard to feelings and resentments, no one played with anyone else.[9]

According to Carbonnier, games and other opportunities to involve luck are "full of unexpectedness where there is hope for Providence" (and the author goes on to quote Paul Valéry's famous "Each atom of silence / Is the chance of a ripe fruit"). Afterward, however, the popular trend will be to attribute "winning"

7. "État-Providence" means "welfare state."

8. Carvais also highlights that the first thinkers of probabilistic mathematics were professional jurists or the sons of jurists (Bacon, Copernicus, Leibniz, Machiavelli, Pascal, etc.). Law, as a natural mold for intellectual debate, occupied the space now filled by the social sciences. It thus had total control over writing, along with medicine and theology.

9. Carbonnier (2008: 559), about *La Chance et le droit*, by Bénabent (1973).

to individual qualities (earnings are appropriated in a personal capacity), and "losing" to unfortunate accidents (loss is socialized). From this point of view, randomness is a social construct. It is an institution in the Durkheimian sense, François Héran writes (1987: 160, and passim), namely, the lasting result of an impersonal instituting power which exceeds individuals. It is significant, he adds, that in games of chance, one often *plays* one's date of birth or phone number, as if one were seeking to guess some intentions. This casts luck as a metaphysical construction, the agency it implies not yet being an intention.

While there really is some continuity between luck, which must be "hunted," and providence, which, according to its etymology, "provides and foresees," the connection within the series is not unilineal, owing to constant interference between individual and collective or impersonal aspects, internal and external sources, and between the realm of the possible and that of the fatal.

Luck has to be earned

In our sample examples, playing is always a means of drawing "luck," and "happiness," but without it being necessarily specified in which field, or in which form this luck is expected, like when we cross our fingers, or knock on wood. Nonetheless, some regularities can be noted. As always, weddings must include games aiming at the couple's good relations, and their wealth and fertility, thus ensuring progeny.[10] A trip, a love affair, an exam to be passed, or even success for some kind of business: these are all opportunities to play informally, in private, or even in secret, in daily life, the range of desirable goods with undetermined elements being indefinite. The exam or the trip once taken, playing then becomes useless.[11]

From this point of view, luck lies downstream from play. Playing, by its structure, allows people to overcome the undetermined, and luck adds to this all that the intervention of individual agency can add. This explains why so many divinatory or propitiatory practices are structured as games, and why, conversely,

10. Pop (2002) gives examples for past and present-day Mongolia. In rural areas of southern China, nowadays, games of *mahjong* still contribute to a wedding's success. It is also played before dinner, to ensure that all goes well. (Hamayon, fieldwork notes, 2000).

11. In ancient China, the soothsayer sets a time for his prediction's fulfillment; if the prediction is not realized by the appointed time, it becomes worthless, and the lord executes him (Boileau 2013: 66–71).

the act of playing is willingly seen as being somewhat augural. This also explains why there cannot be a shamanic healing ritual without a divinatory component. The *indeterminacy* of luck encourages the players to play and play again, and the shaman to throw his drumstick up once more.

A natural correlate of training implied by the preparatory dimension of play, repetition is also a frequently noted trait of ritual mechanisms. But does it guarantee success? When do we decide that we have played enough, or obtained enough luck? The internal sanction immediately springs to mind as an answer: victory in a dual game, the drumstick falling "right side up," and reaching the target with an arrow. However, the existence of an internal sanction in a binary yes or no mode is not crucial for obtaining luck: what ultimately sanctions the shaman's mime, the socially acknowledged source of collective luck for hunting, is the full discharge granted to the shaman by the participants at the end of the ritual (the hunting season's success being the external sanction). Besides, whether or not the wrestler is victorious, the very act of wrestling strengthens his personal luck, whereas victory compels him to communicate it. Luck is not a homogeneous notion, and not all its facets fall under one single process. Perhaps the easiest to analyze is the luck provided by private games with internal sanctions.

PERSONAL LUCK: PRIVATE GAMES WITH INTERNAL SANCTIONS

Given that any private context is an opportunity to play, games are an opportunity to increase one's personal luck potential. Everybody is supposed to possess a luck potential as a dormant attribute.[12] The latter is perceived as being linked to one's vital strength—Buryat *amin* (Mongol *am*'), Yakut *kut*—yet in a way external to one's own person. Vital strength is to the soul what flesh is to the body: the food enabling it to live; immaterial, it is carried by and contained within the flesh. In my understanding, Siberian languages do not distinguish between the flesh constituting the body and the meat that feeds it.

12. The terminology of personal luck has varied a lot throughout the history of Mongolian languages, which are rather stable in other lexical fields. It is very rich nowadays. The term *talaan*, borrowed from Russian, which in turn borrowed it from the French *talent*, is the most frequently used in Buryat. As for *aza,* it is in principle little used in a hunting context; if it is used, it refers to a form of luck perceived as excluding all relational causalities.

The notion translated as vital strength is close to what French calls the soul, in the sense of a kind of substance, as in the following expressions: *force d'âme* (literally "strength of soul," but usually translated as "fortitude"), and *manque d'âme* ("lack of soul"). The Mongols and Buryats attribute the fact of losing a game or missing a target to a lack of vital strength. In this respect, vital strength appears as contributing to making physical strength an *effector* (Mongol *hüch*, Buryat *hüsen*), and transforming it into power (*tenhee* in both languages). Filled with vital animal strength, game meat brings the hunter enough to feed both soul and body. It is all the more nourishing when it is eaten fresh.[13] Like game and luck, it is assessed in terms of more or less, and not of everything or nothing. All must preserve it, nurture it, and, if possible, increase it, by hunting, for instance, or by training in physical games like wrestling. A. Lavrillier has discovered a more complex notion among the Evenk, that of *onnir*. Everybody has an *onnir*—i.e., spirits that manifest themselves by various "talents" (singing, dancing, hunting, caring, performing rituals, etc.). Playing is a means to enrich one's *onnir* (Lavrillier 2013: 264).

Our societies also have some sense of "personal reserves of luck," which those concerned can increase, but also risk losing.

In his experimental study on forecast, John Cohen assessed that young subjects and teenagers tend to believe they possess reserves of luck that can be depleted and replenished (Cohen 1960, basing his views on inquiries led in North America and published in a previous book, *Risk and gambling*, Cohen and Hansel 1956: 146–147). Their hopes are reinforced if they share the view of many children that luck and ill-luck are reserves which may be depleted or run out altogether (Cohen 1960).

The feeling that there is in luck both something internal and something external to the person explains the following fragment of the half-excuse, half-complaint letter of resignation Disraeli sent to Queen Victoria:

> I always feel that I did not bring your Majesty good fortune, and there must be something unlucky in a Minister who had to encounter six bad harvests. (Quoted by Hocart [1936] 1970: 144)

Disraeli claims some responsibility for these six bad harvests, but without personally feeling guilty. Luck would have been his. But misfortune is external to him, even though his position causes him to feel some responsibility. He has lost, but has there been a win somewhere else? And to whose benefit?

13. Hunger for fresh game meat is thus separated from hunger itself.

Playing alone

This brings us to the issue of solo playing. According to Caillois, in *alea* games, by definition, the player "has no control, and [. . .] winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over an adversary" ([1958] 1961: 17). This was not the case for the drumstick throw examined in the previous chapter, which implied neither a "fate to overcome," nor an immaterial agent to challenge or let act. If the positive sanction of the drumstick throw or of a solo game obviously creates a winner, must it then also create a loser? For the Mongol who plays jacks alone, what matters is obtaining a favorable configuration, as shown by the case of

> this scholar who does not leave his home until the jacks have smiled upon him. He says that he sometimes throws jacks up to a hundred times [. . .] before leaving his dwelling. It is a way of "searching for good luck," *az tüshüüleh.*[14]

The positive sign that the jacks provide is enough for him; he regards them as *aztai*, just as others regard a certain number as their "lucky number," *aztai too*. No need to imagine a spirit's intervention, no need to imagine that the luck hereby obtained causes someone else's misfortune, and no need to imagine which activity is favored in this way, though nothing prevents it either. Like throwing a drumstick, throwing jacks brings a favorable probability with no origin or destination, valid for all prospects, provided that one engages in action. This commitment duty is all the stronger if it comes with the prohibition of remaining passive. Once his jacks have "smiled upon" him, our scholar *must* leave his home to go on with his business; the "effect" being expected only for the current day, he starts over the next. In short, it is his way of "preparing himself" to carry out as well as possible his daily activities, or to benefit from them as much as he can.

Once again, belief without belief content

This commitment duty reminds us of the twofold requirement Jean-Pierre Albert (1994: 239) notices in "luck chains": the necessity of passing them around goes hand in hand with the prohibition on keeping them, even though the

14. I thank Pierre Palussière warmly for this story told in December 2010 from the capital city Ulaanbaatar. Mongol *az* (Buryat *aza*) means luck by chance, excluding any agency.

meaninglessness of their message is blatant, their effect resting in their movement between anonymous persons. No more so than luck chains do jacks aim at communicating a particular message. But they differ from luck chains in that they are played alone, and imply no movement other than the throw itself. They aim at generating a purely informational sign, restricted to negative and positive options, and free from all interpretation, seeing as, by definition, it refuses content.[15] Altogether, this sign only prompts action. In a way, this is the potency of the lack of meaning, of which I enjoyed an up-close illustration during one of the Ducasse festivals on Trinity Day in Mons, in Belgium, throughout the 1990s, thanks to Georges Raepers, who headed them back then.[16]

Eight man wearing "leaf" outfits carry the dragon's tail during the reenactment of Saint George's fight, which ends the Ducasse. One of them told me he felt joy mixed with surprise each time he was picked to wear this outfit (the waiting list was long). He indeed deemed it "ridiculous" and "pointless" before the Ducasse, but "priceless" during the festival itself, precisely because, in itself, it was pointless. There was always someone, during the preparation meetings, questioning its meaning, and whether or not to renew it, and the conclusion was always that it was precisely because it was pointless that something could happen when the eight "leafy men" carried the dragon's tail around the main square.

From internal sanction to uncertainty

The uncertainty that this type of game entails is not, therefore, *alea* as a principle such as Caillois defines its impact upon the player: "The player is entirely passive; "he does not deploy his resources, skill, muscles, or intelligence. All he need do is await, in hope and trembling, the cast of the die" ([1958] 1961: 17). Our scholar had to throw and throw again his jacks, and the positive sign he obtained compelled him to act, but he had nothing to do with it; he only draws

15. This sign does not fall under the "floating signifier" category through which Lévi-Strauss, at the end of his "Introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss," explains the use of "purposeless" notions ([1950] 1968: xliv–l). The floating signifier's "sole function," he writes, is to bridge a gap between the signified and the significant, or to indicate a disparity relationship between them.

16. Georges Raepers was able to give the Ducasse, a medieval festival, which with time had come to be treated as folklore, the true aspect of a great collective ritual. I would like to take this opportunity to express once again my admiration and gratitude (cf. Hamayon 2001b).

from it a fleeting momentum, his personal reserves of luck have not been increased. The main content of the term used here, *az* (Buryat *aza*), is to exclude all kinds of causality. It thus applies to strokes of luck which lead to success, or to not being spotted upon committing a crime.[17]

In particular, excluding all types of relational causalities renders a verdict indisputable. Also, succeeding in a random game with an internal sanction may be invoked as proof of a cause's righteousness (Cohen 1960). And trial by ordeal consists precisely in resorting to a random internal sanction in order to decide an individual's guilt. Conversely, it is also because the ordeal disallows any relational-type causality that the practice was forbidden by the Christian Church, either because there can be no other judgment but God's, or because God must not be "tested." According to Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century, and to others afterward, resorting to it meant tempting God (Godescard 1771: 659). But this is also why luck in this type of game does not bring the player the same prestige and power as do lucky demonstrations of his vital strength, such as success in hunting, and victory in wrestling, which reinforce him, and which he must redistribute.

. . . and from uncertainty to relational causality

A practice I observed in the Mongolian capital in the 1970s illustrates a form which combines the recourse to uncertainty and the invocation of a relational causality: the naming of a child. Parents, anxious to give their offspring a name which will bring it luck throughout their life, prepare pieces of paper, and write a name on each of them. When mother and child are still in the hospital, they ask the obstetrician or the midwife—figures of luck, since they perform a vital activity, but without being sources of luck themselves—to draw among these pieces of paper. On the one hand, a shortlist of acceptable names, on the other, a refusal to make the final choice oneself—the other side of which is the unspoken desire to leave room for an immaterial agent while channeling it through the obstetrician's hand.[18] There are some advantages in delegating the choice: if the child falls ill, the name will be the first to be blamed, and a new name will be

17. We would probably call this "fluke" rather than "luck."

18. Grégory Delaplace (2008: 142–43) notes a similar attitude among some highlanders of north-western Mongolia as to the location of the burial sites for their kin. They leave the deceased's body on his or her place of death.

given immediately afterward. The broad spectrum of possible sources of luck has a downside, however: just as broad a spectrum of possible sources of misfortune.

LUCK IN HUNTING: ITS COLLECTIVE SIDE AND ITS PERSONAL SIDE

The type of shamanic ritual performed to obtain luck in hunting stages a relational process.[19] This kind of ritual (see above, ch. 9) attributes the source of luck to a game-species spirit. It ascribes to the entity which is a source of luck the same nature as the game which this luck ensures. It posits this entity as female, thus placing the shaman in a male position, which gives him the advantage in their play-based relationship. In pre-Soviet times, female shamans were not authorized to perform this ritual. Other peoples elsewhere in the world also attribute the same kind of love relationship to their shamans, with the same prohibitions, and liable—in the event of a transgression—to the same consequences: the loss, for the shaman, of what makes him a shaman.[20]

For the western Buryats at this time, every hunter as a member of the group received a share, *hubi*,[21] of this collective luck, *zol*, as the catchphrase *zol hubi* corroborates. This share gave him the right to hunt, which was itself an asset with regard to this right's implementation. This share of collective luck was interpreted as "game promises." But in order to fulfill these promises, the hunter's personal luck had to be added to. These two kinds of luck continuously intertwined. In that respect, the notion of share or batch formed a compound with that of individual destiny,[22] *hubi zayaa*: "share destiny." (This compound is better

19. The steps of this relational process are analyzed in detail in Hamayon (2012d).

20. For a few examples, see Hamayon (1998a: 36–37). It is not said that, in order to engage in this relationship, the shaman must be lucky. But he must have given to the hunters in his community some proof derived from the world of the spirits (e.g., describing for them a tree and a moose that he spotted in his dreams, and that they must go out and collect in the forest to make his drum's frame and membrane from the tree's wood and the moose's skin).

21. Buryat *hubi* (Mongol *huv'*) means "individual portion or share"; being *hubigüi (huv'güi)* "without an individual share" is understood as luckless, unfortunate.

22. In peasant Russia, several terms conveyed a similar notion; *dolja*, share of material good (bread, kasha), specialized in the sense of fate, destiny; *schast'ie*, derived from *chast'*, share, specialized in that of happiness, not limited to the subject; *vek*, allotted time to deplete the share of life one has received: whoever dies before, too early, is

understood than that which links destiny and luck in a more general way: *zol zayaa.*) We can perhaps decipher, in the relative significance of the notion of destiny, and in the typical expressions of the herdsmen, seeds of fatalism contrasting with the active forms of luck searches which characterize the hunters, individually and collectively.[23]

Before setting out hunting, as if to entitle themselves to do so, hunters to this day privately address the spirits of game-species, in order to have the right to hunt, and to provide themselves with assets. Siberian hunters internalize from childhood the vital need for luck, and the will it requires. It is a constant preoccupation, inseparable from their experience of the forest, and of the lives it shelters, inseparable from their technical know-how, and from their concentration: they must avoid any noise or smell which could make the animal run away, watch out for the slightest trace, or the slightest sound, which could reveal them. It is essential that they do not waste their share of luck; that they respect, before the hunt, all the prohibitions; that they refrain, during the hunt, from taking more than can be eaten, and afterward, from boasting about their spoils, or squandering them.[24] (As a side note, let us remember that no hunter is indifferent to the game's mating requirements,[25] and that many in Siberia see themselves as forerunners of contemporary ecological movements.) Besides, it is essential to not mistreat anything, whether personal or family amulets, considered material media for luck. These are all inviolable principles, for no redemption is possible.

All this behavior helps to strengthen the hunter's personal supply of luck by stimulating his vital strength, even when he comes back empty-handed. Certainly, not seeing any game means being momentarily "without luck," *zolgüi*, but

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mourned, but whoever lives too old is accused of "eating the others' lives" (Francis Comte, conference communication, 2002).

23. Perdue (2002) spots a distinction between *fate* and *fortune* in the war relationships between the Mongols and the sovereigns of the Qing dynasty.

24. Boasting would mean taking advantage of the generosity of the game-species' spirits; complaining would offend them.

25. For the peoples I have studied, individual souls of the members of a species "come back" to life from one generation to the other, perpetuating the species, without increasing it (Hamayon 1990a: 400). The case of overkilling that Willerslev (2007: 34) observed in Yukaghir society is exceptional, probably caused by Russian influence. It contradicts other information found in the same work, such as when an old hunter stops hunting because his son's medical condition deteriorates (ibid.: 44–45).

seeing too much makes the hunter dread some misfortune; in such a case, the hunter would rather pretend he has not seen the animal. The following is a popular Buryat saying: who has taken a hundred bears will be taken by the hundred and first. But there is no symmetry: though excess certainly is harmful,[26] lack of luck in the hunt is not perceived as needing to be compensated by happiness or luck elsewhere; it can last without being perceived as excessive. A hunter will be said to be lucky if he meets a bear, a fine potential spoil, but he will have lacked luck if he does not manage to catch it. Yet there will be no question of luck if he is not killed by the bear, or of bad luck if he is indeed killed; it will only be of revenge of the spirits or of skill and bravery. The notion of luck in hunting remains, in this context, attached to the idea of the spoils which should concretize it, and to that of the relationships with invisible entities prone to grant it, and to that of having been able to seize it in time. Hunting as a lifestyle gives the notion of luck a potential collective reach; and this notion exceeds hunting as an activity by virtue of its flexibility.

Thus, the hunter is an agent of his own luck, aware of everything it depends on, as well as everything it provides. This understanding has its part in the persistency of the Evenk's propensity for emulation, even though they can no longer hunt in their native northern Buryatia. What yesterday represented the reliable hunter's bold and optimistic nature now constitutes that of the successful entrepreneur (Safonova and Sántha 2010).

LUCK IN ALL ITS ASPECTS: SPATIAL, DYNAMIC, AND MATERIAL

When hunting, luck, and the right to hunt intertwine. The very fact that the hunter sets out in one direction is enough to save any prey he finds for himself, the latter being proof of his right, and his luck. No hunter chases prey that has already been chased by another hunter, even a bear. This gives a concrete foundation to the figurative uses of the Turkish term *jol~yol*, "road," which belongs to the same Altaic root as the Buryat *zol*, "luck." This also explains the widespread

26. In this case, excess is defined with regard to the rule of exchange with spirits of edible wild animal species. It is quite different from the type of excess recently observed by Rebecca Empson (2012) among the Buryats of Mongolia. She describes cases of arson against people deemed to have accumulated "excessive" wealth in today's context of a free economy, provoking jealousy and envy within the community.

use—in Siberian ritual vocabulary—of "route," in the sense of "path of luck," as a direction both of travel to undertake, and of the movement to carry out. A "road" is understood as a personal, potentially "lucky," way of doing things: everybody has personal "roads" in life. The personal "route" (*zam*) of a Mongol "turned black" since he fell prey to alcohol (Merli 2010: 206, 270). "Routes" traced by grass balls set alight by the Koryaks send back to their homeworld the substitutes of their prey, and in this way favor the return of luck next season (Plattet 2005: 206). Every Tungusic shaman clan possesses "routes" in the world of spirits, accompanied by particular songs and customs (Delaby 1976: 89–92 and [1977] 1998; Bulgakova 2009). The "route," moreover, is the bard's personal style of singing among the Turkic peoples of Central Asia (Zeranska-Kominek 1997: 77).

In Mongolia, each nomadic unit has the housewife sprinkle milky tea on the ground around the yurt early in the morning so that the family members' "road" may be "white" ahead all day. The landscape is peppered with cairns (*ovoo*) that are seen as resting places for the souls of dead humans; every person who passes by drops a little vodka there, along with pinches of tobacco, or a few sweets or cookies, so that his "road" can be white, i.e., pure, free from all obstacle. Among the Nanais (a Tungusic group living in the Amur Basin), the shaman tells a tale about the invisible road *diorgil* along which he shamanizes (precisely, he tells his road "as a tale"), and the tale has a happy ending; telling a *diorgil* is a means of "winning" (Bulgakova 2013).[27]

As for the Japanese term *torii*, it is usually translated as "gate, door"—and one of the possible etymologies of this word is: "where the birds are." In some places, there are carved birds decorating the top of the gates. We may consider that a succession of gates represents a kind of road. This goes for the Fushimi Inari-Taisha Shrine, near Kyoto in Japan, a place where one may ask for fortune and happiness.

The notion of movement per se also matters. The Buryats classify shamans according to their capacity for movement: a "riding" shaman, *moritoi böö*, is considered more powerful than a "walking" shaman, *yavgan böö*. Movement is the determining factor in the private ritual (widespread among cattle-breeders) called *dallaha* in Buryat, *dallaḫ* in Mongol; but in this case, the movement is

27. Apart from its association with the luck of living human individuals, the notion of road (or direction) is also used for talking about spirits (including the souls of the dead).

directed toward oneself, and not in some outward direction: it consists in turning the arms clockwise slowly, palms up.[28] This beckoning gesture aims at attracting happiness and prosperity, in the form of game, rain, or other things; all good things are supposed to move toward he or she who calls for them.

The spatial aspect of luck is inseparable from its dynamic (or energetic) aspect in the Buryat gesture of "drawing it toward oneself" (*hurailaha, dallaha*) by rotating the right forearm raised vertically. The notion of movement has a key place in the conception of luck as in that of play. Luck, if we can say so, *is born of movement* (the gestures of players and shamans, throwing drumsticks and jacks, rotating one's arms, displacing objects, wind that makes ribbons float or lifts dresses, blowing on one's hands or on the die before casting it, or even glancing at the sky before drawing a card . . .), and *generates movement* (appearance of game, rain, and metaphorical appearance of success and happiness . . .). It thus presents itself as an effector force, recalling, but in a different way, the Polynesian notions of *mana* and *hau*. It is also a dynamic conception of luck expressed by gestures imitating animals, or the movement of animal substitutes: their aim is to make luck "circulate" (Plattet 2005: 245). Chapter 15 will examine the circulation of "luck" as carrying out a function of redistribution.[29]

In Chinese, the ideograms for "luck," *xìngyùn* 幸運, or *hǎoyùn* 好運, contain the idea of movement or transportation in the dictionary put together during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor (Qing dynasty) in 1716, and still used nowadays as reference. The first meaning of the ideogram *yùn* 運 is "movement, circular movement, perpetual movement." The Yijing gives as an example the sun and the moon's revolutions. Another meaning for *yùn* is "destiny," with reference to the movement that defines it. It applies to "destiny" seen through its undetermined dimension, in contrast to *ming*, which is the determined part of movement decided at birth. *Yùnqi*, "being lucky," literally means "to make the blows move." *Yùn* is a component of the words "sports," *yùndong*, and "transports," *jieyun*.[30]

The notion of movement, including the force that generates it, really seems part of luck's specificity within the semantic series of random immaterial goods. Apparent in Siberian societies, it is also present in our own societies: we cross

28. This ritual is analyzed in detail by Chabros (1992).

29. Several contributors to da Col and Humphrey (2012a) also insist on this notion.

30. I am grateful to Aude Flückiger and Liu Pi-chen for this information on the notion of "luck" in Chinese (see also Homola 2014: 169).

our fingers, pass on luck chains, throw coins in rivers, and rub the feet of statues. Maybe we can draw it closer to another notion, that of *materiality*, present in Mongol jacks as in our lucky charms, medals worn on bare skin, or crystal balls, and, everywhere in the world, divinatory tools. Movement and materiality, the common point of which lies in constituting concrete signs and deliberately doing without language, would thus be, in an alternate and complementary fashion, common points to play and luck.

THE ASSOCIATION OF LOVE WITH THE HUNTER'S LUCK

> Chance is paradoxically and radically denied in each participant, for *luck* is not found on the ground of probabilities, but is a sign of election, of seduction. *Luck is never neutral*, it can be wooed, forced, encouraged [. . .] challenged [. . .].
>
> – Mike Gane, *Baudrillard: Critical and fatal theory*

A tint of love recalling the relationship between the shaman and the game-species' spirit also colors the hunter's personal luck. It is often explicitly credited to the hunter himself, and sometimes expressed in terms of seduction, like in Amazonia (Descola 1986). In Siberia, this tint expresses itself in suggestive songs, which, on the eve of a hunt, provoke sensual dreams, and also in the widespread idea that real animals accept to get caught "out of love." It also explains the abstinence requirement, in addition to the technical reason that the smell of human intercourse scares the animals off. Sexual abstinence is also required of the shaman before a ritual, and, for the Mongols, of the archer before an archery contest (Lacaze 1999–2000: 115).

Noting similar correlations in Central America—"nobody slept with their wife"—Guilhem Olivier (2010: 63) recalls the very sharp intuition that Frazer had expressed in the "hunters and fishers tabooed" section of chapter 20 of *The golden bough* ("Tabooed persons"):

> This practice of observing strict chastity as a condition of success in hunting and fishing is very common among rude races; and the instances of it which have

> been cited render it probable that the rule is always based on a superstition rather than on a consideration of the temporary weakness which a breach of the custom may entail on the hunter or fisherman. In general it appears to be supposed that the evil effect of incontinence is not so much that it weakens him, as that, for some reason or other, it offends the animals, who in consequence will not suffer themselves to be caught.

Indeed, we must give full credence to the fiction of the animal's "loving gift" to the hunter.[31] The success of the hunt will later be reformulated in these terms. Failure does not discourage the hunter. His lustful dreams must not have been passionate enough; and he will start again the next day. By contrast, too much success should be doubly feared: if he refuses actual "loving gifts," he risks alienating others in future; if he accepts them all, he risks, it is said, ending up letting himself be drawn so deep into the forest that he will be unable to come back among humans. The logic of this tint of love to the hunter's luck is a reflection of that underlying the shamanic ritual.

LUCK MATERIALIZED AND SHARED

A feeling of abundance and a taste for sharing permeates hunting luck as much as love. The spoils will be distributed, and each share brings with it abundance and vital strength itself, the source of future life and luck.[32] This is why, during a game hunt, a hunter's luck does not arouse the others' jealousy. This is also why, today still, selling game meat is difficult to accept: it means losing the luck it bears. "Selling meat? That's savage," argue the whale hunters of Uelen (Chukotka) in Tonolli's film *The death of a people* (2009), when this policy is imposed upon them in order to "modernize" their village. Game meat is not stolen either, for it bears luck only for the fortunate hunter who found the animal, and for those with whom he shares his spoils. Any stolen meat would bring the thief unhappiness.

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31. This is specifically the subject of Hamayon (2010).
32. Catholic missionaries stationed among the Canadian Ojibwa use the autochthonous term *jawend*, "luck," to translate charity, pity, joy, and wealth all at the same time; *jawengados*, "I am lucky," also means "I receive communion during the Eucharist" (Servais 2006: 208–9). The immaterial good is shared and materialized.

Hence, in hunting, there are two positions for the notion of luck, which combine in two different ways both individual selection and collective benefit. The collective luck gained during the ritual, prior to the hunt, is specific (it applies to catching game only) and selective (though handed out to all, only a few are actually allowed to partake in the catch). After the hunt, the luck assigned to the pieces of meat that have been shared out is received individually, and is multipurpose: it applies to other areas than hunting, for the hunter himself, and, by extension, to those who benefit from his spoils.

HOW EQUIVALENT ARE PLAYING AND HUNTING?

The time has come to venture a parallel from the perspective of luck, not between playing and hunting in general,[33] but between the public Games and meat hunts, already connected by the presence of a random stake, by the trust vested in them, and by the joy they provoke. Playing means establishing a particular field, but also carrying out one or several games without their necessarily being linked to this field. There is a prerequisite to hunting in another field than that of hunting: ritual, which consists, for the shaman, in "hunting luck," so that the hunters may then hunt game, and which legitimizes the hunt. Whether the result of the shamanic ritual, the hunt, or the Games, the luck that befalls someone applies to all, and is considered a benefit that must be redistributed.[34]

This is still the case nowadays, notwithstanding the generalization of the internal sanction during the public Games, and the personalization of the results that follows. Winning increases the personal potential of the winner in the same way that bringing back game increases the hunter's. But victory obliges the wrestler not to keep the luck he has won for himself, in the same way that success forces the hunter to share his luck and his spoils. During the Mongol *Naadam*, people gather around the victorious wrestler and the victorious horse

33. Hunting grouse is also a game, because the hunter must crawl on the ground and mind the sun's position, so as to not be seen; it is the only one that lends itself to laughter (Lavrillier 1995: 51–52). In Nepalese, the name of the dice configuration "playing wild game" means hunting, and "playing the net" means fishing (Anne de Sales, personal communication, 2011).

34. The original meaning of the French "to win" is "to graze" or "to obtain food" (*Le Petit Robert*).

to collect their sweat—the realization of their winner's luck[35]— and rub their foreheads, arms, or even clothes and gear with it. It is noteworthy that this luck has retained its value of luck fit for sharing, even though no relationship with immaterial beings is implied. It is as if publicly sanctioned victories give the physical expression of the winner's luck a near-metaphysical reach from which others can reap the benefits.

Let us note that private games also mix internal sanction and a lack of explicit links with immaterial beings. But the luck that they generate applies only to the player (and perhaps to his immediate family), and only in that moment. Unlike luck linked to vital strength, it can neither perpetuate itself, nor endure, nor be conveyed to others. Likewise, luck provided by individual hunts for fur animals, the results of which are usually kept secret, remains the privilege of the hunter himself.

However, there are no similarities between playing and hunting from other perspectives. Indeed, hunting cannot be analyzed as a dramatic representation of another action that it would aim at "preparing." Not only is it not a frame, in which what we do refers to something else, but what we say about it—game offers itself to the hunter out of love—refers to something else than what it actually does—killing.

FEMININITY OF LUCK-SOURCE ENTITIES

The association between luck, love, and abundance (the word "fortune" unites these notions),[36] present both in the shamanic ritual and in the hunter's dreams, expresses the idea that luck comes from the attraction exerted upon an immaterial female entity. The femininity of these providers matches the masculinity of their human recipients, who in turn provide tangible goods for the benefit of other humans. The Greek Tychê[37] and the Latin Fortuna (often represented

35. In Mongol, this type of personal luck is called *hii mor'* (Lacaze 1999–2000; 2000: 351; 2010: n. 4; Empson 2012; Charlier 2015: ch. 2).

36. This link between love and luck is pointed out in the title of the collection of articles by mathematician and logician Charles S. Peirce: *Chance, love and logic* ([1923] 1998).

37. The etymology of Tychê contains the notion of hitting a target, or of meeting someone by accident.

with a cornucopia)[38] are also female. Contrary to their Siberian counterparts, who remain animal and anonymous, these ancient Mediterranean givers of luck are humanized, and endowed with names which personalize them, and raise them to the rank of goddesses. In their case too, luck is the result of a relational process, which earns them the qualifiers of capricious and blind, because this process is both selective, and meant to ensure some redistribution. The idea of a compensation between these notions, as between the limited goods they evoke, can also be found in the French saying *heureux au jeu, malheureux en amour* ("happy in game, unhappy in love"; and vice versa).[39] A similar balance is ubiquitous in western Buryat traditions: the hunter is meant to dream that he desires some female animal, and abstain from sex with a human woman before going hunting (Hamayon 1990a: 510–11); as for the epic hero, being unlucky at hunting is a necessary compensation for confirming his rights as a son-in-law, and vice versa (ibid.: 236).

. . . their masculinization and their humanization

But later on, these ancient goddesses were gradually overshadowed by the gods.[40] In Siberia, when pastoralism developed, the figures that mattered most to the hunter were masculine figures that until then had remained in the background. Buryat hunters still dream about the daughters of Bayan Hangai, a forest spirit with the majestic demeanor of a moose,[41] but it is this spirit himself, their father, that counts as "game giver" in their common speech: in this way, there is a dissociation between two animal figures, the female one which gives

38. For Jacqueline Champeaux (1982–87), Fortuna was a fertility figure at first, both generic and abstract, both game and huntress, living in springs and caverns. She was then thought to live on the hills, appropriated by chiefs, and hence multiplied in personal forms. This is how she was able to hold a cornucopia in her left hand, and a rudder in her right. The link between Fortuna and Gubernatio maintains social order by redistributing luck. As for the Fortuna of Servius Tullius that Dumézil (1943) describes), appropriated and personalized, she grants him power.

39. I am grateful to Dominic Horsfall for pointing out the equivalent English expression: "lucky at cards, unlucky in love."

40. Champeaux shows that Fortuna was Jupiter's mother at first, and then, as the centuries passed, became his daughter.

41. The Devil of popular European Christianity, an animalized figure, the hoofs and horns of which evoke the edible horned ruminant, is supposed to bring luck to whoever "sells their soul" to him.

the hunters luck, and the male one, of superior status, which actually allows game to be taken. As for the Yakuts, who, in the middle of the nineteenth century, believed that hunting luck came from a female Baai Bayanai (Hudiakov [1866] 1969), a few decades later, they depicted the same Baai Bayanai with the traits of a tall, strong, and often bearded man, much like a Russian: they both masculinized and humanized this figure (as well as associating it with the very image of power).

Ancestors: Dispensers of grace

In pastoral Buryat life, the spirits that matter for subsistence are the male ancestors, supposed both to protect their progeny, and to punish them if they transgress the rules of lineage. What the herdsmen expect from them is "grace" or "blessings," *hesheg* (share of abundance). It is the expected benefit from the prayers and sacrifices they address to them, mainly during the collective rituals performed at the cairns, *oboo* (Mongol *ovoo*), atop the hills.

Hesheg (Mongol *hishig*) comes from the word *kesig*, "share," a noun derived from the verb *kesekü*, "to cut," found repeatedly in *The secret history of the Mongols* (in this thirteenth-century chronicle, it also means "shift on guard," Rachewiltz 2006, I: 344). The meaning of share has remained in Mongol *heseg* and Buryat *he*h*eg*.

Translating *hesheg* as "grace," despite the Christian connotations of this word, has the advantage (unlike "fortune," "happiness," or "prosperity") of implying the existence of a giver—here, the ancestors, or the "masters of lands and waters," or the "White Old Man" in Buddhisized areas. Grace is attributed to beings and objects as a characteristic of the share they constitute. Like everything that is a share, it can in turn be shared out.[42]

Hesheg, "grace," expresses itself in two forms: the positive one of rights enabling pastoral life, and the negative one of protection from wolves, thieves, and other entities liable to hinder it.[43] It is an integral part of domestic animals, and of their products, meat and dairy, and reserved for the line that breeds them. In return, pastoral families must respect social rules and worship their ancestors. This is particularly required of daughters-in-law as a token of loyalty to their

42. On the *hesheg* of the Buryats living in Mongolia, see Empson (2003 and 2012: 118), and on grace in general, see Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers (1992).

43. The ancestors are not the ideal equivalent of what they give out, as the spirits of wild species were for game, but a customized personalization of pastoral rights.

husband's family. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the preservation of the household's *hesheg* falls to women; and this has been confirmed for the Buryats of Mongolia by Empson (2012; da Col 2012: 17). The nature of grace remains, like that of the luck expected from the Games, ill defined or negatively defined: everything would go badly if the rituals were not carried out. However, grace is seen as more stable and reassuring than luck, since it stems from an activity leading to production; therefore, with a more predictable result. The male givers (the ancestors) are also more stable and reassuring, in that they have a relationship of continuity with its beneficiaries, as opposed to female luck givers in relationships of elective affinity. And the conventional behaviors of worship are more reassuring still when compared with the uncertainties of the art of playing.

Ancestral grace kept for oneself

At the time when colonial pressures, because of the abolition of serfdom in Russia, incited conflicts between Buryat groups, some among them sent their shamans out to their ancient grounds in order to steal sacrificial meat from the groups that had pushed them off their land (Sandschejew 1927–28: 546, 559, 607; Baldaev 1970: 48). From their point of view, it was their ancestors' grace that this meat materialized, even though it came from animals bred by the newcomers. By coming back to fetch it, they hoped to collect their ancestral rights and the protection associated therewith. Nowadays, the preservation of grace in the form of its material media is still as important as that of the goods to which it is linked. The pastoral family who decide to sell an animal retain a few tufts of its fur, and the housewife rubs the inside of her coat with its snout; if they sell its milk, they keep the last remaining drops in their own bucket (for the Buryats of Mongolia, see Empson 2012). Even some elements of their house, with no direct relation to the practice of herding, or to the cattle's vital strength, are thought to be suffused with ancestral grace. But this grace is not multipurpose, like the luck that wild meat bears, and seems to apply solely to pastoral activity. In particular, it has no bearing on what pertains to the natural world: in order to make the rain fall, it is always better that wrestlers wrestle; and to restore one's health, it is always best to please the souls of the dead, who do not have the same status as ancestors, and who roam around, starving and frustrated, in wild places.[44]

44. The idea is that these souls, banished from organized cults and humanized habitats, will grant material goods to those who take care of them. This is why, at the

IS THERE A CORRELATION BETWEEN THE MASCULINITY OF THE GIVING FIGURES AND SECURITY?

Therefore, when basic subsistence is ensured by a productive activity, there is a notable tendency to replace an animal luck-giving female figure with one or more human grace-dispenser male figures. It can be said of this productive activity, particularly animal rearing in the areas considered, that it both reduces the part of indeterminacy, and increases security. We may also note that it is accompanied by a transformation in the social organization. The hunting lifestyle favored alliance relationships: these have the flexibility required of the need for cooperation. The pastoral lifestyle, by contrast, favors relationships by descent: they preserve within a single line their rights over pastures and herds. In short, the immaterial entities which matter for survival are female when indeterminacy makes it necessary to cooperate with others, and male when concerns for security recommend keeping to within one's own descent line.

Other private forms of luck: Multipurpose, blurry, and without a giving figure

Over the course of the twentieth century, and mainly since the arrival of the free-market economy in Mongolia, alongside inflexible and restrictive form of pastoral grace, other types of luck became increasingly important, as did alternative methods of attracting luck (horoscope, lottery, gambling . . .), of which only a few required rituals and the intervention of specialists. In the Mongolian capital, a shaman can be solicited before borrowing money from the bank, or in order to find a suitable husband. The "calling of luck" is part of the rituals every shaman offers to carry out. But its practice no longer has anything to do with hunting or playing. Previously, he would have gone to the solicitor, and would have only been paid afterward, depending on the "effect"—in principle at least. Today, he receives customers, who pay the expenses of the chosen ritual from a list of proposals in advance. If he summons spirits, he usually advises concrete actions (object manipulation, visiting places, leaving offerings), and with no link to a luck entity (Merli 2010). The aim of these practices is to simultaneously divert misfortune and bring luck. While these shamans have adopted the professional medical model, they

beginning of the Soviet era, the souls of the French communards defeated in 1871 were given offerings by Lake Baikal fishermen. They expected to catch more fish in return (Mihailov 1965: 100).

also recall the marabouts whose cards are handed out in the Parisian subway, and herald "success in love" and "payment after results," like the ancient shamans.

LUCK: AN OBSTACLE TO THE WIELDING OF POWER

Random decision-making processes, and indeed divinatory processes in general, are, as is well known, scorned by centralizing powers, for, as Montesquieu said, *gouverner, c'est prévoir* ("governing is planning"). The last Roman Emperors, Cohen (1960) recalls, sought to retain the monopoly on knowledge of the future. Augurs could say *non consulto*, suggesting that they would not intervene, while at the same time leaving no doubt as to the purpose of their function, which was to increase (*augere*) the likelihood of success of that of which they spoke. In Korea, at the beginning of the Common Era, counselors of the emerging royalty of Silla were aware that randomness could pose a threat to power itself. Could they stand by and let the king conduct renewal rituals, which until then had been in the hands of shamans?[45] Given that these rituals were designed to "make rain," they decided: "we do not want our king to run the risk of failing."[46] Changing dynasties is not as straightforward as changing shamans. . . . The pragmatism of the shaman's action upon the random here and now is what constitutes shamanism's strength, but also its weakness: there could be neither a shaman pope, nor a shaman king.

While the risk of failure deters a centralizing power from resorting to random processes, other reasons also serve to discredit these processes as such. Medieval France only legalized the game of chess once the pieces' movements stopped being decided by dice. Reading the past and the present belongs to the Devil; predicting the future, to God, says the wizard Merlin. Generally speaking, established religions were hostile toward random practices, which claim, with a view to meeting the needs of the *hic et nunc*, to act upon what is invisible, or what has not yet happened. In so doing, these practices violate transcendence and divine omnipotence, and pave the way for transgressive counterpowers.[47]

45. According to Hocart ([1936] 1970), mastering a society's life-giving ritual is a means for a centralizing power to establish itself.

46. Dieter Eikemeier, oral communication, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, December 1992.

47. A French law (loi n° 73-1193 du 27 décembre 1973 d'orientation du commerce et de l'artisanat, art. 44) forbids making a living out of guessing, predicting, or interpreting dreams, recalls the Chief Commissioner, in order to protect citizens

And the church tried to suppress them by reorienting human requests toward the prospect of salvation after death, which, by definition, is not liable to any kind of empirical verification; and by discrediting all that belonged to "play." A transcendent being can only be worshiped. In India, play is a godly domain, and humans can do nothing but lose. Indra is always the winner, and sacrifice makes him win. This may shed light on the injunction "to stop playing dice and to merely plough the land" found in a ritual text translated from Sanskrit by Silvia d'Intino (2005: 127–28, 139).

Can the notion of randomness itself be eliminated? It is meaningful that Christianity, like Judaism before it, established, in addition to the omnipotent God, a figure of Providence, but with a different make-up.[48] In France, the medieval church forbade games of chance and random draws that called upon Providence to influence the results: their aim of forcing decisions made them "unworthy of God." Later, Malebranche questioned the complex distribution of roles between God's "general volitions," and the "particular volitions" for which Providence may be useful (Molino, 1987: 138).[49]

> So one who believes that God acts via particular wills must explain why God appears to fail so often. [. . .] If we presuppose that Gods act by particular volitions, as most people believe, then what impiety it would be to fear that he might favor injustice or that His providence might not extend to all things! [. . .] If God produces this effect by a particular Providence, then far from providing for all, He positively wills and even brings it about that the most virtuous person in the land goes without bread. It is better, then, to maintain that this grievous effect is a natural consequence of general laws. And that is what we commonly mean when we say that God permitted a particular misfortune (Peppers-Bates 2009: chapter 1).

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who get carried away by their need for hope, which also explains Article 405 of the Penal Code, suppressing misleading advertising.

48. Hadot (2001). Schmidt (1998) notices that (Flavius) Josephus gives two definitions of divine Providence: as justice, it makes man accountable for his actions; as historical causality, it rules according to God's plan, and resembles the idea of destiny (Greek *heimarmenê*, what was obtained through sharing).

49. Pairs like God–Providence are abundant in ancient religions (Hastings 1908–26, Vols. 2 and 6).

To sum up: if God acted via particular volitions attuned to each case, instead of with a particular corresponding volition according to general laws, God would be directly and willfully responsible for evil and suffering. If God tacked together particular plans for particular events instead of willing a general end covering many events, He would lack foresight and wisdom. Particular wills cannot be the method of God's operation in the created realm. (Peppers-Bates 2009)

In the meantime, Machiavelli (1513) had followed a different path, and modified the long-term trend that paired up Fortuna and Virtus (understood as the quality of *vir*), as jointly vital to success in battle. He praised rigorous Virtus as being more useful to a Prince to govern and maintain his power than uncontrollable Fortuna. To denigrate and discredit Fortuna, he reduced her to the propitious moment she provides: the Greek *kairos*, or the Italian *occasione*. Maria-Pia Di Bella (2013) tells of how this reduction led to representations combining attributes of Fortuna and Occasione, a character symbolized by the lock of hair running down his forehead. The idea spread that no "opportunity" could be seized without "virtue."[50]

Another, modern, Korean example sets yet another course. A booming Buddhist trend rejects "prayers for luck" that aim at tangible and instant benefits, because they imply that it is possible to influence the Buddha and Bodhisattva to whom they are directed. To compete with them, new rites of devotion toward Buddhist entities incorporate the desired practical objective (such as success in competitions and exams); repetition of these rites is supposed to ensure self-improvement, which will be the best ingredient for success.[51]

Luck: A counterpower tool

The fact remains that the share of indeterminacy that the act of playing inherently generates explains how games, and practices structured like games, come to multiply, and in indefinitely renewed forms, especially when the context is marked by a free-market economy and individualism. Luck can be exploited all the more if it depends less on invisible entities, and interpreted all the more

50. Later on, folklorists denied any "virtue" to Sicilian peasants, because they continued to link "luck" and "destiny" (Maria-Pia Di Bella, seminar communication, 2003, 2013).

51. Florence Galmiche's communication at the Réseau-Asie Conference, Paris, 2011.

freely if it stems from the fact that simple movements serve as an internal sanction. But it cannot be linked to nothing at all either: projection into the future cannot flutter in the void and gloss over imaginary elements.[52] If luck is luck, and not randomness, it is only insofar as it does not eliminate the intervention of an invisible agent, nor the possibility to bargain with it. While indeterminacy brings little security, and may cause the lucky person to feel guilt (will he have to pay for his luck?), it has the advantage of exempting him from any binding relation, and of creating in him a fruitful expectation, since it is pervaded by speculation dynamics. Chapter 15 will try to unravel the social obligations that luck imposes on the lucky person. But before that, let us examine another qualitative means of differentiating players: cunning.

52. When my grandson Romain reached an age where he no longer believed in Santa Claus, he sighed: "I'm not going to send my gift list to my parents, am I?" What better way to illustrate the fact that narrowing the possibilities to what is empirically verifiable would limit the vital part played by our speculative imagination for projection into the future?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Strategy
Cunning

> Par la bonne fortune on se trouve abusé,
> Par la fortune adverse on devient plus rusé.
>
> – Joachim Du Bellay[1]

> Guileful in all matters but this one, fortune is sincere in that it disguises not its guile.[2]
>
> – Bossuet, *Sermon sur l'ambition*

Luck is not the only nonphysical selective factor to shape the core aspect of play, though the other factor we shall consider here is essentially different from it.[3] Whereas luck comes, at least partly, from "elsewhere"—involving one or more invisible agents impossible to identify or control—this other factor comes down to distinctive human mental characteristics. In internal sanction games,

1. "Good fortune's only a snare / While ill luck teaches us how to prepare and take care." *The Regrets,* translation by David R. Slavitt.
2. "La fortune, trompeuse en toute autre chose, est du moins sincère en ceci, qu'elle ne nous cache pas ses tromperies."
3. The strategic dimension of play is one of the most studied. In this chapter, as announced in the introduction, I have limited my analysis to what my own data contributes to our understanding of play.

this mental aspect makes one win. Both by convention, and to facilitate our own reflection, we will call it cunning, owing to the intuitive parallel this forms with luck as a selection factor for activities with uncertain outcomes. Like luck, cunning simultaneously favors one and frustrates the other, but while luck is at stake in playing, cunning operates within the field of play in order to come out of it.

The Buryat term *mehe* (Mongolian *meh*) accounts for a mechanism that can be called cunning, and that is indeed translated by "cunning" in Western languages. *Mehe* is used to describe, in wrestling, the series of holds that will bring the opponent to the ground. It is one particular use of its general meaning of "cunning." Another is "deception."

In all Buryat and Mongol dictionaries, cunning is the first meaning given, bringing the opponent to the ground in wrestling only coming second. The Mongol verb *mehleh* means to use cunning, to deceive, to cheat, to swindle. The expression *mehii mehendee* applies to one who gets caught in his own trap.

In wrestling, *mehe* applies not to a specific hold,[4] but to general know-how, *erdem*, which rests on a methodical mental process (Laurent Legrain, oral communication, 2011).

But outside this type of context, it is often a simple method, a process *arga*, an *arga zal'*, a trick.

Before we try to determine whether these nuances influence our understanding of wrestling, and if so, how, let us set out the difficulties of our use of "cunning" in developing our train of thought. While its French use now comprises similar nuances, this has not always been the case.

DISSIMULATION

Originally, French "cunning" (*ruse*) had a more limited use. The etymology of this term, as all dictionaries show, links it to the vocabulary of hunting, where it applies to the diversions made by game to avoid their predators. In this way, cunning is first and foremost a defensive behavior, allowing the animal to ensure its survival by compensating for its objective weaknesses. Even if this hunter's

4. I thank Okhinoo Legrain for this clarification. I should add that cunning, deception, conspiracy, and unfair action are, in Uyghur Turkic, possible uses of *oyun*, play, according to Jarring's dictionary (1964).

viewpoint has nowadays been largely forgotten, our understanding of cunning still encompasses the idea of dissimulation, a link to be found in numerous other languages. "Can those who cannot hide their craftiness still be regarded as cunning?," the Chinese novelist Jiang Zilong asks himself. "Psychologists have chosen to call this intelligence 'Machiavellian' because it first manifests itself, among primates, as the ability to engage in covert action and misdirection" (Gell [1996]: 3).

In ancient Greece, cunning does not limit itself to defensive behaviors either. In their analysis of *metis*, Detienne and Vernant clearly oppose passive forms of cunning to its active forms. They do this by contrasting the image of the chameleon, which hides out of fear (and thus protects itself), with that of the octopus, which transforms itself out of cunning (in order to then attack). The former undergoes a constant need to change, while the latter is always in control of its movements (Detienne and Vernant 1974: 48). Therefore, one changes its appearance, the other its behavior.

As far as I know, the Buryats do not use the term *mehe* for wild animals that hide. In their eyes, it is quite normal that potential prey should try to hide from its predator; it is a condition for survival. Nor do they use the term *mehe* for a hunter who climbs a tree to escape from an angry bear. The advantage that one gives oneself does not threaten the other; it is an inevitable moment in the chain of survival. However, *mehe* can be used about a predator: here, the term applies not to the fact that the predator hides in order to close in on his prey—a hunter on the lookout, for instance—but to what he uses to attack, as we shall see below.

Hiding, in itself, is not deceiving. But actively impersonating someone else? This question has already appeared several times, but from different perspectives. According to Tertullian, stage plays were deceptive because they claimed to represent beings that do not exist: it was these beings, the gods, that he was really targeting. Shamanic simulation, however, was not deception in the eyes of the Siberian peoples, for it did not try to conceal the shaman's humanity: the shaman remained standing, and the antlers, placed on his head, were made out of iron. Simulation sought to allow him to act in another field, and this other field was clearly delineated. Nor did Caillois' *mimicry* seek to deceive, since it presented itself as a game: "playing make-believe" is not making someone believe in something. In short, the field of play, like that of ritual, ensures that, in assuming the appearance of someone other than oneself, there is no intent to deceive.

ACTIVE CUNNING

Mehe is used for some of the common practices behind real hunting and fishing, as it is for the strategy of holds in real wrestling. *Mehe* exists where a decoy is used to draw game closer, or bait to lure fish,[5] and a widespread saying goes: "luring the fish by craft" (*zagaha mehelhe*). Through this notion, we can outline, in the Buryat understanding, a tighter relation between hunting (or fishing) and, if not play in general, then at least playing a game with internal sanction. In one case or the other, *mehe* is the key to success. I have not encountered the distinction in Buryat that could be made in French or in English between the hunter's "luring," which applies to members of other species, and the wrestler's "cunning," which applies to other members of the same community. For the Buryats, what characterizes *mehe* is that its implementation is always individual: the wrestler wrestles against other wrestlers, one by one, and the fisherman attacks a specific salmon, not salmon as a species. Therefore, the cunning of bait or a decoy is, dare I say, fair play.[6]

Besides, it is significant that Mongol wrestlers are not ranked by age or weight class, but according to which titles they have won (Lacaze 1999–2000: 82–89). Classification does not rely on purely physical abilities; it takes mental skill, *mehe*, into account: making up for relative weakness, this can ensure victory, the personal aspect of which it highlights—*mehe* makes a good wrestler. However, *mehe* does not consist only in a series of holds; it is a general strategy, which implies the need to defend oneself. This is manifested in various traits: a great deal of caution, of anticipation of the opponent's reaction, and of correctly weighing the risks; and it can also contain an element of dissimulation.

Cunning on the threshold of the field of "play"

Is there something, in the general strategy of wrestling holds, that allows us to understand why the term which refers to it, *mehe*, can also mean deception? It does not seem right to incriminate caution here, since, generally speaking, all

5. *Mehe* does not apply to bait (*üyee*), or to the lure (*men*), but to the fact of using them.
6. There are various opinions regarding the digging of pits along the migratory path of a group of cervids. This practice, originally Russian, is considered harmful, since it does not distinguish between animals good for hunting and those that should be protected, notably pregnant females.

that is passive, and motivated by self-defense, such as the weaker animal's dissimulation, is not called *mehe*. Should we understand the notion of deception in terms of the purpose behind the strategy of holds? This strategy's purpose is to put an end to the fight. By granting victory to one wrestler over the other, it makes them emerge from the field of "play" not as mere wrestlers, but as differently ranked wrestlers in the field of ordinary reality. The fact that victory provokes the passing from one field to the other explains the presence of referees: as codified as the various holds may be, the sequence in which they are executed remains the wrestler's choice; therefore, their outcome is subject to a referee's judgment.

There is nothing, however, in the general attitudes at the end of the fight which leads us to suspect deception. Whatever the referees' role, victory does not permit boasting;[7] and losing does not dent the loser's *fair play*. One fundamental reason dissuades us from contemplating the outcome of the series of wrestling holds in the public Games in terms of deception. The fact that victory grants the victor the honor of being surrounded immediately by people who collect his sweat to rub their foreheads with it removes any negative connotations from the notion of cunning. Far from deceiving the loser, the winner's cunning is a source of "luck" for all beyond the game. Cunning and craft belong to the wrestler's "know-how," to his *erdem*, a term constructed with *er*, "male, virile," like *virtus* is based on *vir*: thus, it really is, if we may say so, the hunter's virtue.

Hence, *mehe* implemented in wrestling, where opponents compete on an equal footing, has a positive image, like luck as a whole; but unlike luck, it is strictly human, yet all the while generating a specific luck for the benefit of others.

From cunning in games to deception beyond the game

Generally speaking, we cannot say that cunning takes on a negative aspect as soon as it applies to something other than deciding between opponents. However, there is a fine line between cunning and deception, the crossing of which consists in allowing intelligence to prevail over force with regard to others. This is one of the questions discussed by the contributors of *The reasons of cunning*. For one of them (Steichen 2004: 56–57), cunning was not the privilege of the

7. Historically, these referees' original function was to guarantee the primacy of wrestlers representing the Buddhist Church.

weak as a power strategy, and could be used by the strong who do not want to use force. This would be, precisely, from the point of view of the initial reference to cunning, a swing toward deception. Another author (Holder 2004: 169)[8] reverses the approach, by examining an example drawn from the history of Dogon country. He shows that what appears to be a power grab by a group of warriors is in fact a political act that allows the creation of a state: what would usually be seen as a crime here serves the idea that power is held by those most capable of wielding it, and that only success confers legitimacy (ibid.: 168–72). In the Bible, cunning seems to be judged according to the collective value of its result: bad if all it has done is save face for whoever has used it; good if it has permitted a surfeit of life to a greater number (Wénin 2004: 335–36).

Thus, we must examine the impact of cunning beyond play, and the repercussions of the power relationship established by play in external empirical reality. Johanne Villeneuve insists on this relation to reality:[9]

> In contrast to the player, for whom reality is momentarily on hold, the cheater is both *inside* and *outside* the game, the limits of which he therefore controls. The cheater is he who, beyond the game itself, controls the relation between the game and the reality within which the game takes place. (Villeneuve 2004: 57)

THE "EFFECT" OF CLEVER PLAY ON REALITY OR THE MEASURE OF INTELLIGENCE

> But once a fool always a fool, and the greater the power in his hands the more disastrous is likely to be the use he makes of it. The heaviest calamity in English history, the breach with America, might never have occurred if George the Third had not been an honest dullard.
>
> – James G. Frazer, *The golden bough*

8. The local etymology of the term the author translates by "cunning" evokes the idea of "bringing something or someone down to the ground."
9. This author designates the Latin verb *tricare* as the common etymology for the notions of cheating and intrigue.

This is how the notion of cunning can shed light upon this paradox of play consisting in its relation to empirical reality: it has a decisive role in crossing the line between these two fields. Without going so far as to say, as Villeneuve suggests in the following part of her analysis, that crossing the line "institutes a new game, consisting in pretending to pretend," we may agree with her on the fact that the notion of cunning opens a nonphysical play-space between the wrestlers. The latter also compete based on their mental abilities, which govern their body movements; and the winner will be determined according to these mental abilities. This is why the game's internal sanction matters outside of the field of play, namely in that of empirical reality.

In this respect, the evolution of our Games is illuminating. In the former Games, individual results were not taken into account. Winner or loser, each wrestler carried on singing and dancing. Dance-type games also required mental capacities, particularly for the improvised verses which gave rhythm to the rounds; provocation was one aspect of these verses, but they were aimed at promoting oneself rather than seeking to make the others lose, as is the case in wrestling. The main intent was to ensure the proper functioning of the relationship between humans and the hunted species. Hence, the participants had to provide the surrounding natural world with an image of a united human community, made up of different and complementary members giving their best. It was not the Games' purpose to drive the differences between humans to the point of discrimination.

Yet discriminating between humans has in fact become, at least partly, the aim of wrestling, and other internal sanction games, physical or not, as they have developed over time within the Games. With the rise of pastoralism, the notion of exchange with wild species has lost its relevance, and hierarchical relations within society have become increasingly important. The next chapter will show that the composition of the Games tends to invite the notion of sanction all the more, and therefore, implicitly, that of strategy. Not only do games that comprise an internal sanction by definition, like wrestling or racing, predominate, but the competitive dimension also broadens, and expands to all kinds of games, always seeking more diversity and mental ability. This evolution of the Games' composition will lead us to ask whether it also reflects an evolution of the notion of power, and of access to power within society.

This raises a preliminary question, stemming from the correlation we observe between the increasing prevalence of human hierarchies over exchanges with the natural world, and from the ever-increasing importance of the internal sanction within the Games: while we can say that cunning is the tool of the

internal sanction, can we say that cunning only exists between humans, and that the possibility of deception has its origin therein?

DOES THE SHAMAN USE CUNNING?

First, let us examine this aspect of the shaman's action. While, for humans, his action belongs to play, in the spirits' world, it is supposed to have a value of reality. The personal fashion in which each shaman performs is thought to determine the hunting season's success; the relative abundance of wild game; and the low number of illnesses and deaths within the group. On this subject, I previously wrote, somewhat hastily perhaps, that the shaman had to "employ all his arts of seduction and trickery" (Hamayon 2010: vi), but this does not apply to the two main moments of ritual action in the same way.

When the shaman repels his rivals, that is, humans from other groups, his mime resembles a fight against an imaginary opponent; in this respect, he probably implements a strategy, but nothing is said about it, and the mime shows no sanction of this confrontation. However, the mere fact that the ritual continues implies that it has succeeded. While it is not said that he has used cunning to repel his rivals, there is nothing to contradict this opinion, all the more so given the fact that he had to defend himself against them in the first place. The name of his costume, "cuirass" or "armor," evokes the defensive aspect of his fight, and the antlers on top of his crown its offensive aspect. Sometimes, an iron dagger shaped like the "first head" of the young cervids, and fixed to his crown in the middle of his forehead, completes his outfit.

He then approaches his animal "spouse"; our notion of cunning could seem apt to describe his behavior, for instance, when he tickles her armpit in order for her to drop more of the reindeer hairs that, in this frame, materialize luck for hunting.[10] But from the autochthonous perspective, to speak of *mehe* in this situation, in which, furthermore, the shaman is not defending himself, would be inconceivable. The ritual clearly shows that he is not engaged in a dual game against his "spouse," but rather in a loving relationship with her; thus, there is

10. This kind of behavior resembles some of those observed by Anne de Sales (1994: 113–15) concerning the Kham-Magar of Nepal: the shaman "makes the witches dance" so that they cease tormenting an ill person, while he traps or hunts the spirits of nature, seen as savage animals.

no internal sanction to be expected—victory or defeat—either in the world created by the ritual, or in the reality it prefigures. The hunt will happen anyway, and so too will the compensation in vital strength: it would be as unbelievable to expect to avoid human death as it would be to not catch game. This is why, far from trying to vanquish his "spouse," the shaman works hard to establish with the species she represents as beneficial as possible an agreement for the humans he represents—which somehow is still "winning."

The bedrock of selection

Indeed, it is only logical that this ritual benefits the human group who tasked the shaman to perform it. He must therefore convince the living participants that his behavior during the ritual fits the ritual's objective. This objective, as we have said, is first and foremost to find an agreement with the game-species spirits, for this is the condition for obtaining luck, and then success in the hunt. Personal abilities once mattered for the hunter peoples in choosing the shaman in charge of this ritual: according to conventional requirements, the shaman had to be sturdy, able to jump high, and to sing loud, but there was no particular mental ability truly expected of him. As for the Buryat shamans, they had to have an institutional title, of which there were two variants.

To the west of Lake Baikal, one had to possess an *udha*, shamanic "essence," to be a shaman. This term means, in everyday speech, "meaning, content (of a word, of a statement), purpose (of an action)"; for a shaman it meant, at that time, "origin, community of ancestors having held the same office, right to become a shaman like them." This is why the Buryats who had to translate this term for foreigners, well aware of the inherited character of this right, interpreted it as "all of his shaman ancestors": for instance, they said "his shaman ancestors torment him," or "his shaman line torments him."

The term used to the east of Lake Baikal was (and is, nowadays, for most of the new Buryat shamans) *shanar*, "quality." It applied (and still applies) to qualification stages accomplished by performing rituals under the direction of a master, and through the acquisition of new accessories. However, a "shaman root," *ug*,[11] i.e., having shaman ancestors, is a condition for undertaking these qualification stages.

11. Ippei Shimamura ([2011] 2014) titles his book on contemporary Buryat shamans of Mongolia *The root seekers*, because they become shamans, or ask shamans to create virtual shaman ancestors for them, in order to demonstrate their Buryatness.

Both these terms have an expressly qualitative content. They thus seem built to assert the shamans' selective nature by keeping with the idea of the shaman's selection by spirits inherent to the ideology prevalent in the hunting lifestyle. But this is misleading—these terms in fact conceal social requirements: belonging to a shamanic lineage, and, in the case of *shanar*, rising through the ranks of hierarchical institutions. However, while selection was institutionally circumscribed, individual reputation was assessed by the results of ritual actions.

Loyalty toward the spirits of wild species

Indeed, the "effects" of the shamanic ritual upon empirical reality truly mattered. Besides, there was no ideal model to follow because each time the shaman was obliged to show his action on the spirits *as it took place*. He was said to be "good" if the ensuing hunt turned out to be fruitful, and illnesses rare. If this was not the case, his group ceased calling upon him. This meant that, during the ritual, he had to take as much "luck for hunting" as possible (wild game promises), and then commit to giving back as little "human vital strength" as possible, and as late as he could (promises of human deaths). The good shaman was he who respected the exchange, while making it benefit the humans; he who was able to show great vitality in the ritual's first phase, and find the right amount of himself to offer to the spirits in the last. To offer himself up too briefly would anger the spirits, who would not see this equivalent to the "luck" the humans took. If, by contrast, he offered himself up for too long, the danger grew that he would not "come back."[12]

Thus the volume and due dates of the trades gave significant leeway favoring the humans, without making them winners and the spirits losers: the ritual established no hierarchies between the two groups. But the nature of what the humans had to give back to the wild species spirits in exchange for game was nonnegotiable: it could only be human vital strength. With the spirits of wild species, neither cunning nor deception was possible. While the shaman did not intend to mislead the spirits of wild species, but only benefit fully from his player position, the fact remains that he manipulated this ritual to their relative disadvantage; and that this ritual was tightly linked to the youth Games aimed at

12. The participants averted this threat themselves, as soon as they deemed the amount of time passed suitable, by igniting a lighter above the shaman in order to "reanimate" him.

distracting them. This fact led me to comment on their complementarity above: the Games entertained the spirits in order to let the shaman get the most out of his ritual action. From the point of view of the participants, there was no deception: wrestling and dancing gestures were truly entertainment. Hunting peoples did not attribute to the animal spirits the ability to see in their Games something other than what they comprised gestures loaded with vitality; similarly, they did not attribute to them the slightest interest for verifying the amount of game promises exchanged, since they themselves considered game uncountable. But they kept for themselves, and for their own advantage, the use of mental abilities that they took to be fundamentally and specifically human, especially in the fictional frame of play and ritual confronting them with wild species. It is as if, in particular, they refused to believe that animal spirits could be capable of calculating an amount, or decoding the symbolic meaning of their gestures. This illustrates the useful latitude a fictional frame provides for what is done in the name of "preparation" for a given real activity.

Analysis of the former Games has shown that "play" is an excellent means of communicating with the *spirits of wild species* considered both in general and *in abstracto*, provided that the humans take on the male position, and the spirits the female position in this directed act. While "playing" prepares "hunting," "hunting" can be considered as its application, as a means of individual and tangible communication with wild *animals*. Like the shamanic ritual, the practice of hunting emphasizes the love relationship uniting the shaman with his "spouse," and the hunter with the animal he hunts, a love relation which embraces its predatory conclusion while hiding it. This embrace explains how the shamanic ritual is said to aim at "obtaining luck," and at "preparing the hunt," and stages a wedding to express the settlement of an alliance. It also accounts for the perception of hunting: originally the result of an amorous impulse, in practice, hunting becomes an internal sanction game, which concerns solely the individuals present. If the idea of "killing" does not belong to the hunter's vocabulary, it is precisely because hunting is seen as an internal sanction game. The animal's death is perceived as being this sanction.

This double perception of hunting still explains how animals may at times be seen as female, and other times as male opponents.[13] As in all internal sanction

13. The shaman's "wedding" with a female spirit is the expression of an alliance with her species' generic spirit, usually seen as her father, hence the frequent sexual confusion of the spirit dispenser of game (see above, ch. 7).

games, resorting to cunning, *mehe*, is not only accepted, but also vital for deciding between players: *mehe* is part of the game. In this light, the link between our two types of games takes on a bigger profile: the link itself is at the core of the representation of the hunting lifestyle.

THE SPIRITS OF WILD SPECIES CANNOT BE DECEIVED

Thus, the hunter's art concerning individual animals cannot degenerate into deception, and neither can the shaman's concerning the spirits of their species. By requiring that the good given back be *of the same nature* as the good taken, the ritual sets up the wild species' spirits as "impossible to deceive." This characteristic appears as the flip side of the need to be assured that there will always be game (or fish), even in small amounts. A substantial amount of other data confirms this characteristic and its ideological reach. No prohibition regarding a wild species as such is ever transgressed: no reparation, no ransom would be possible, since any replacement process would be perceived as deception, and thus rejected. Jean-Luc Lambert (2007–8) demonstrated how the Russian Empire, after centuries of trials, finally established that the bear, as a figure of its species (usually represented by a bear pelt), should be the entity before which members of animist colonized peoples had to swear an oath. The bear could be the guarantor of the oath, because it could not be deceived, and therefore was immune to human manipulations.

Imbecility of dead human souls (and other deities)

Another type of confirmation is illustrated by the reactions of some shamanist Buryats to Buddhism in the early twentieth century: they disregarded the Buddhist deities to whom were offered goat shapes made from flour and painted red. What power could such divinities have, they said, if they let themselves be fooled by offerings of food that is not food![14]

Around the same time, however, the way these same Buryats tried to scare the souls of their dead (by waving hawthorn branches, for instance), or to buy

14. We can see this illustrated by the mere umlaut that separates the verbs "to exchange," tauschen, and "to deceive, to make believe," täuschen (Gerschlager 2001) in German.

back the health of their sick (by sacrificing domestic animals as ransom, whose meat they ate themselves), made the Buryat intellectual Hangalov say: "My people really treat the spirits of their dead like complete idiots!"[15] This was also true of the Mongols until recently, with regard to the mental abilities they attributed to the souls of their dead. Fearing their revenge, they gave their sick children names to divert their attention away from them: the deceased, they thought, would not recognize in "Anonymous," "Not this one," or "Who knows" the child they sought. This presupposed that the souls of the dead were impervious to the principle of substitution,[16] that they took everything *literally*. It really is on the "imbecility" of the unfortunate deceased soul that the effectiveness attributed to the use of substitutes and euphemisms is founded, whereby effectiveness is understood as protection against misfortunes. We can wonder whether, as Irène Théry (2012) thinks, "it is not speech, the defining characteristic of humanity, [which] brought with it [. . .] the great danger of falsehood." At the very least, we can oppose the souls of the human dead as being supremely *easy to deceive* to the spirits of the animal species as utterly *impossible to deceive*. Faced with the margin of manipulation implied by the human spirits' "deceivability," the "non-deceivability" of animal-species' spirits appears, on the one hand, as a source of rigidity, adding to that resulting from "inextensibility," which is considered as typical of the hunting lifestyle (see above, ch. 13). But on the other hand, it can also explain how the shamans of hunting peoples are deemed the most "powerful" across Siberia, and that their practices are considered the most positive in terms of luck-bearing. It is remarkable that the spirits of the human dead are simultaneously "treated like complete idiots" who let themselves be easily misled, and like superiors to be respected. This acknowledgment of hypocrisy suggests that deception goes hand in hand quite naturally with the asymmetrical and hierarchical relationships linking living humans to their dead. In a way, deception would be a spontaneous part of social life, as clearly as it was excluded from the reciprocal and symmetrical exchange with the spirits of animal species ensuring biological life.

This is also an idea conveyed in Mongolian languages by the derived forms of the term *hud* (Buryat *huda*), "relative by marriage on the bridegroom's side (possibly his father)" (*hudgui* meaning "relative by marriage on the bride's side

15. Hangalov (1958–60, I: 398–99; III: 36, 43); Aubin (1973: 485).

16. This argument is developed in Hamayon and Bassanoff (1973) and Hamayon (1979).

(possibly her father"): the verb formed with the reciprocal verbal suffix *hudaldah* (Buryat *hudaldaha*) means "to trade" (both sell and buy), while *hudaldaa* means "trade," *hudaldaalah*, "to live off trading, to deal," and *hudal* "to lie," as well as "joke" (as we saw on p. 128 and will see just below**)**.

The porous border between cunning and deception

Hence, we better understand the porosity of the border between cunning and deception such as they are considered in our examples: cunning appears as an active strategy, allowing one individual to defeat another from a different but equal species or lineage; and deception as a typically human defensive strategy against a hierarchical superior. They are, therefore, two different ways of exploiting a margin, and thereby of innovating or adapting. We better understand the practice of horse-stealing as well, typical of rivalries between herdsmen who have kept "a hunter's soul," and who know how to continue to *play fair* when the stolen herd is taken back from them.[17] Such a theft was considered a feat when executed by a poor person to the detriment of a rich person; it then had to lead to redistribution. Even in the nineteenth century, the Mongols still said that a horse thief was a man of quality, a "good man" (*sain er*).

A convergence of analogous traits, though apparently paradoxical, could also be found in two famous figures of Greek mythology, Pelops and Hermes, central examples in the collective reflection on deception initiated by Caroline Gerschlager (2001: n. 291).[18] Pelops wins the chariot race during the Games imposed by Oenomaus on his daughter Hippodamia's possible suitors, but only through her cunning—yet this cheater is considered the founder of the Olympics. As for Hermes, he first became known as the thief of his older brother Apollo's cows, then for his art of negotiation, the basis of his messenger persona—yet this thief is considered the god of trade and traders, as well as the god of herding and herdsmen, and the god of thievery and thieves. Cunning in play and theft between peers are, here too, fair game—including between the gods of Olympus, who do not hesitate to resort to them when they want to favor those they love. We could say that, in the society of immortals, like in the societies studied here, cunning is accepted in games between counterparts and

17. On this type of cattle theft in the Mediterranean world, see Di Bella (1998).

18. In his brief inquiry into sports in Antiquity, Raymond Bloch (1976) studies these same figures. Also see Dingremont (2012) on the agonistic world of the Odyssey.

equals, because it is the prime nonphysical distinguishing quality, and deception is accepted in relations from the inferior to the superior on the same hierarchical scale, because it allows for a reversal of the balance of power in the absence of a supervising arbitrary authority. The intervention of a completely transcendent authority is needed to condemn what we call deception.

Luck in the previous chapter and cunning in this one discriminated between players. The next chapter shall examine the obligations these two forms of selection entail, and the gateways that both of them open toward a type of power.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The social and political repercussions
Redistribution and hierarchization

> A poor king is a contradiction in terms.
>
> – Arthur Maurice Hocart, *Kings and councillors*

We have first emphasized the collective aspects of the public Games, then the factors that differentiate individuals. This chapter questions the back-and-forth between individual and collective. Every player participates in creating common hope, but luck and cunning differentiate between them. As soon as these have selected a player by virtue of how they influence an outcome, they force a redistribution, but each in its own way, and with variable results on leaving the field of play. Two gateways to a certain type of power are hereby outlined: that of charisma, stemming from the redistribution of luck, and that of hierarchy, stemming from victory. Both of these come up against the problem of the concentration of this power.

LUCK: CROSSOVERS BETWEEN SELECTION AND REDISTRIBUTION

Once again, our reference example will serve as food for thought. It provides a general view of an economy of luck, based on actions structured as games and

carried out on several interlocked levels, involving all the protagonists of the hunting lifestyle, human groups and wild species, shamans and spirits, living and dead. Selection and redistribution alternate. Two episodes of the shamanic ritual, omitted in the above description, will form the backdrop of our analysis.

The shamanic ritual: Double selective distribution of materialized luck

These two episodes are opposite and complementary. Tasked by the hunters to provide them with luck, the shaman first had to share out what he had just obtained, which he did in two steps, the first one reassuring, the other stimulating. He then had to distribute among them the fulfillment of the promise, made on behalf of all, to compensate the spirits—distributing the worst after having distributed the best. Chosen himself to initiate this dual dynamic, he could not benefit from it. This luck was materialized in a number of different ways so as to be redistributed.

Among the Evenks of the Yenisei River, it was shared out through the reindeer hairs the shaman collected in his drum by dint of swinging it. He handed out an equal handful to all the hunters present, and then threw the remaining hairs into the air at random: the most alert among them then had to catch them midair.[1]

Among the Nganasans, Samoyedic people of the Taymyr Peninsula, the shaman arranged pieces of frozen meat or dried fish on a reindeer hide; he then gave a handful to each hunter and threw the rest in the air; here too, the quickest ended up with more (Lambert 2007–8: 156–58).

For another Samoyedic people, the Selkups, the distribution involved effigies of wild animals at which the hunters had fired arrows beforehand (Prokof'ev 1930). The local Evenks sometimes did the same thing, in addition to the reindeer hair distribution (ibid.). As for the Yakuts, the importance of distribution was expressed in the very name of the ritual, *iẖyaḥ*, based on a verb meaning "to share, to distribute," according to Pekarskii's dictionary (1907–30).

There were thus two steps of distribution, egalitarian, then selective, encouraging both social redistribution and individual responsibility. Once everyone had received a kind of basic allocation, the quickest or the most skillful took an additional advantage, as if equality was being immediately rectified by a

1. Vasilevich (1930: 61; 1969); Anisimov (1958: 28–29); Mazin (1984: 94–97 and 91–93); Hamayon (1990a: 555–60).

selection process. The latter never raised a word of protest,[2] in part because the outcome was determined by a random throw, and in part because this kind of skill is part of the hunter's remit, and the spoils obtained thanks to this surplus of luck were destined to be redistributed. In fact, as an additional asset in a personal capacity, this surplus reinforced one's duty to hunt; it was part of the collective luck, which compelled all lucky individuals not to keep the result of their luck for themselves.

The second episode was a divinatory act performed at the end of the ritual, after the sequence where the shaman, lying down, offered himself up as a token of the forthcoming contribution of human vital strength to the spirits. Under the guise of predicting each participant's future, the shaman would determine their life expectancy by fixing an end date. All were doomed to perish one day, so that game might come back, and that their progeny might live. All would die, but some before others.

For each participant, the Evenk shaman would fire a miniature arrow through the smoky opening of the hut; depending on the distance this arrow fell from the hut, the participant had more or fewer years left to live. Generally speaking, the shaman did his best to shoot as far as possible,[3] for his being deemed a "good" shaman, able to postpone the fatal deadline, depended on the lifespan of his own folk. Whatever the result of the shot, it was not commented on during the ritual.

Individual luck supporting the common interest

Both short and performed in silence, these two episodes formed a striking contrast with the liveliness and joy of the games and feasts comprising this long ritual. They suggested that luck should be put to the service of the common interest, and that its unfortunate counterpart, also selective, should be accepted in the name of this same common interest. As with any gain, any loss affected the entire community. Hence the close entwinement, on these successive levels, of egalitarian distribution and individual selection. In principle, such a duty of redistribution prevents any accumulation of wealth, or any accruement of

2. This suggests that, under the guise of the random throw of his drumstick, the shaman could also favor some to the detriment of others, without anyone protesting.

3. Here too, it is clear that he could influence the trajectory according to his personal feelings.

personal power, by the lucky hunter.[4] However, this redistribution function may be subject to political exploitation, as I will show a little later by way of a Mongol historical example, that of Genghis Khan. The situation was not much different in the Buryat pastoral context. The ancestors' "grace" also had to be shared out materially among the descendants' families, in the form of pieces of meat from sacrificed domestic animals. Certain pieces had to be eaten together right away, others brought back home to each family. This dual distribution achieved the dual objective of involving everyone in his own future, and of preventing any concentration of wealth or power.[5]

THE MATERIALITY OF LUCK: A REQUISITE FOR SELECTION AND REDISTRIBUTION

In this respect, the contemporary Games once again stand out in contrast. Like the former Games, they arouse the expectation of an "effect," even though they are not linked to any ritual. Negatively defined, this "effect" has no material expression, and does not lead to redistribution. In fact, it seems the only way to be among the beneficiaries of the possible "effect" is first and foremost to be a participant, even if only as a supporter. However, the existence of a publicly acknowledged internal sanction has become widespread in these Games, providing every winner with the chance both to enhance his personal stock of luck, and to generate a tangible expression of this luck, able to be communicated. The sweat of the winning wrestler or horse truly represent a new, physical form of luck, which can be collected directly from their bodies in order to be rubbed, depending on the circumstances, on one's forehead, neck, arms, or indeed elsewhere. This is a new back-and-forth, therefore, between luck selection and redistribution through the materialization of vital strength.

In short, there is, as always, a kind of collective luck that is obtained in selective fashion, and then, once materialized, consecutively redistributed and

4. This duty, as I have said, only affected luck with regard to edible game. In contrast, furs, not subject to redistribution, were concealed, and deals conducted secretly.

5. It is significant that the epics end just after the hero's wedding; the wedding actually makes him a hero. But once he is married, he becomes the potential father of a daughter to be wed, and, as such, a potential loser. The epic does not combine the superior status of the giver with the heroic value of the taker. It also forbids any kind of concentration. Concentration is only observed in the versions of the epic of Geser borrowed from Mongol.

regained in the field of ritual or play. And its redistribution upon exiting this field makes it selective once more.

In this respect, the recent transformation of Inuit practices is striking. Céline Petit (2009, 3rd part) shows that rationalization brought about by colonialism and Christianization modified the very idea of winning in games. Instead of being the effect of an individual skill used for the benefit of all, earnings are now kept for oneself, without being redistributed.

Other ways of combining selection and distribution, other games

Here are two very similar European examples of this type of economy of fortune.

In German towns, during Carnival, handfuls of sweets are thrown from the parade floats to the spectators standing on the sidewalks. Everyone strives to catch them. If a sweet hits someone and then falls to the ground, his neighbors pick it up and hand it to him: he is the one that the sweet targeted and hit. He is therefore the designated recipient of the lucky charm this sweet now embodies (Hamayon, fieldwork notes, 1996–99).

At the end of the Ducasse (see above, ch. 13), by the end of the fight between the knight representing Saint George and the long undulating green structure of the dragon, carried by the "leafy men," the participants rush to strip the dragon's tail of its hair, which they will hold on to all year, in their wallet, for instance, as a lucky charm, until the following Ducasse (Hamayon 2001b).

In both cases, selection occurs in a context of potentially general redistribution, though passively in one, and actively in the other. However, any sense of a general redistribution seems exempt from practices based on drawing lots, like those Alberto Cirese analyzes in his fine study of the "Ozieri game" played in rural Sardinia over the past few centuries, where any available goods were too scarce to fulfill the needs of all.

A first type of drawing lots, performed yearly, would create lucky and unlucky individuals on the spot, the former's luck being balanced out by the *unavoidable* bad luck of the latter, but it ensured continuity by allowing for an alternation of positions within the community.

> Such a world could be depicted as *evenly cruel*. [. . .] The chosen mechanism commands at the same time collective equality and individual uncertainty, [. . . and] pays no heed to individual merits or to personal initiative, or to preexisting factual situations [. . .]; it [. . .] cancels history and its cumulative nature. (Cirese 1995: 103)

While the first type was "cruel," it ensured some kind of alternation. But the second type is even crueler, in that it removes this element of alternation: ill fate always strikes the same individuals.

> The allocation of good and ill fate depends not on randomness, but on a deliberate choice. The wishes for prosperity are reserved for the wealthy, and the harmful for the poor. The preexisting factual situation is no longer meaningless, and uncertainty over the only temporary possession of goods disappears. But since the limitation of goods remains, the cost of this certainty (for a few people) is the loss (for the others) of the chance to change their fate. (Cirese 1995: 104)

From one type of drawing lots to the next, the author concludes, "we go from an ideology (or a society) based on randomness and egalitarianism to an ideology (or a society) based on certainty and inequality" (ibid.: 105). But in both cases, since the goods are limited, the condition for the happiness of some is the misery of others (and such is the worldview that soccer embodies, Bromberger [2011] argues.[6]) These ideologies, Cirese says, contrast with progressive ideologies based on "the inexhaustibility of goods (multiplication of the loaves, communism, consumer society)," and therefore removed the need to redistribute the corresponding wrongs.

IS REDISTRIBUTION A SOURCE OF POWER?

Perhaps Cirese would have deemed the practices of Siberian hunting peoples to be less "cruel." They used to share out luck and game among all living humans at the cost of a dual alternation between life and death: between humans and wild species, on the one hand, between human generations, on the other. In their everyday structure, they stuck to the model established by their Games, and their rituals: common values, individual responsibility, nonconcentration of wealth. Lucky hunters, effective shamans, and skillful players alike enjoyed, as providers, a real, yet precarious, authority and prestige; they did not become leaders, given that their power did not extend beyond redistribution. Generally speaking, the lucky hunter did not distribute his catches himself. In Siberia, the task often fell to his matrimonial ally: the latter was, in some Evenk groups,

6. In his comments, Bromberger recalls the famous Latin saying: *mors tua, vita mea*.

the chief distributor (Sales 1980; Lavrillier 2005). But he was so only within the frame in which he performed his function, and was not institutionalized as the "external distribution center," according to Alain Caillé's expression ([2000] 2007: 77–78). Distribution did not make the social relationship more vertical, beyond the moment itself, and in reversible fashion. There was no sustainable power, either for the provider, who did not distribute, or for the distributor, who was not a provider. The shaman was closely supervised in his role of luck provider and distributor. Having to yield a certain result, he was always at risk of being called into question. His community had the power not to renew the equipment necessary for his role, or indeed his mandate to lead the yearly ritual. As an individual, he could not be institutionalized in his function.

Access to power through redistribution of material goods

The hunter had to break free from this social rationale in order to spark a lasting seizure of power, and make the relationship vertical. The story of Genghis Khan in medieval times is an example: as we shall see, he seized the upper hand over his peers through a redistribution mechanism, before going on to found the Mongol Empire.

At first, he was the leader of one of the groups into which the steppe peoples organized themselves back then, in order to raise large herds of horses, and carry out large group beats. These rival groups were also bound together (as mutual in-laws) in the marriage alliance system: they continuously raided each other to take horses and women, and experienced these raids both as challenges they set to the others, and as hunting parties. Thus, victory could only be fleeting, the spoils of each raid being followed by a reciprocal raid in turn. The thirteenth-century chronicle *The secret history of the Mongols* recounts the instances of spouse abductions between clans. Genghis Khan's mother was not surprised to find herself abducted from under her first husband's nose, leader of the Merkit (Even and Pop 1994: 49–50, §§ 55–56), and the latter seemed to accept this, preferring to save his own skin in the moment.

In order to put an end to this vindicatory logic, and assert his upper hand, the future Genghis Khan sought to transform the chiefs of vanquished rival clans into brothers-in-arms, with whom he could join forces to attack other rivals (Hamayon 1986). Serguei Dmitriev tells of how he convinced his vanquished peers to gather their respective "lucks," *sül* (both fortitude and game, or any other loot that is the physical material expression of it), around his own

"luck," supposedly the strongest, since it was what had allowed him to vanquish them. The former chiefs, now brothers-in-arms, brought him their own spoils. The mere fact of uniting them enabled him to assert his authority over them, and increase the value of the shares he redistributed, for he breathed his own *sülde* into these. This term, based on *sül*, later stabilized into the meaning of "charisma," and its use was reserved solely for Genghis Khan (Dmitriev 2010). Thus, it was in monopolizing the redistribution function that Genghis Khan was able to acquire an institutionalized and sustainable position as "external distribution center."

It is logical for all centralizing institutions to concentrate contribution collection and redistribution in the same body—and there is a reason that these terms are derived from the same root. In many ancient societies, contribution collection and redistribution were *together* the setting for the largest feast days, like the one held in Byzantium around harvest time, or even, more recently, the Bachellerie held in central-west France up until the eighteenth century: the peasants contributed, and the lords redistributed.

"If the Bachellerie does not take place, the harvest will not be good," it was said, and also that "a good Bachellerie is one during which blood is spilt." The lord grants the village community rights on his fields and access to the marketplace in exchange for royalties-in-kind (bread, wine), along with games, dances, and songs. The Bachellerie benefits from revenue collection and handles rights on weddings, fishing, and hunting. As for the games, one had to shoot at hens, break pots, and retrieve the soule (hardwood ball), dance and hurl insults. (Pellegrin 1979–82).

But there are also societies in which the accumulation of wealth obliges the redistribution of all of it.

Up until recently, among the Kalash, herders living in the mountains of Pakistan, and in the outer regions of Afghanistan, a man's honor came down to his holding a *biramor* party to the men of his village; for this, he had to have saved enough wealth to become the richest man in the village; after the *biramor*, he was ruined (Loude and Lièvre 1984).

In post-Soviet Siberia, the law encouraged the formation of cooperatives. Therefore, a small group of Yukaghir, an autochthonous minority of Yakutia with very few members, organized itself into a cooperative. Its first leader managed it so well that it was able to acquire a fair amount of goods. He then had to share all these goods with the members of the cooperative, who considered them not to be common goods, but the leader's personal goods. He was obliged

to share it all out and became one of the poorest in his village (Willerslev 2007: 41–42).

History also shows how Genghis Khan's empire later revealed itself to be as fragile as the previous steppe empires. While the vanquished become the victor's brothers-in-arms, their support for the latter remained sensitive to power relationships or charisma, and did not transform into a true institutional dependency. The chief's power remained a personal power. The emergence of an "external distribution center" is not enough to create a political structure independent from its leader.

REDISTRIBUTION OF IMMATERIAL GOODS: FROM LUCK TO PROVIDENCE

Our data provides no comparable examples involving a shaman. But there is nothing to prevent us from questioning the redistribution of immaterial goods: Is this too the subject of a centralizing process? First of all, let us question the figures meant to dispense these immaterial goods. The history of religions includes figures whose function as distributors of wealth is explicitly centralizing, like the Hindu *Bhaga*.[7] The Russian *Bog* is very similar: his name, meaning supreme redistributor (*bog nadeliaiushchii*, "God who gives and shares"), designates in Russian the Christian God, and its derivative, *bogatstvo*, means "wealth." From a cross-cultural point of view, the notion of redistribution provides another opportunity[8] to oppose luck and providence as two poles of one semantic series. From one pole to the other, we go from a good which is actively taken from the bottom, to a good which is passively received from the top. This opposition overlaps with another, well known to the Buryats at the time of the Russian Empire's Christianization. They designated themselves as "peoples with shamans," as opposed to their colonizer, designated as "people with God." While a people with shamans makes the relation to the world depend on humans, a people with God submits humans to divine will. The distance separating the notions of luck and providence does not prevent them from joining together on two different levels. On the one hand, that of performing uncertain activities in a time not yet come to pass—providence, according to its French etymology,

7. Dumézil (1943: 80).

8. See above, ch. 13.

both "provides" (*pourvoit*) and "foresees" (*prévoit*), like luck for hunting. And on the other hand, that of the interdependence of the political and religious domains—luck shall not be restricted to one domain or the other, and in our societies, providence is associated with both the Christian God and the state.

ECONOMIC LIBERALISM, ECOLOGY, AND RESORTING TO PLAY

While communism, by its collectivist aspect, had somewhat extended what remained in Siberia of the redistributive tradition, economic liberalism brutally fomented individual ambitions, widening inequalities, and spreading frustrations, which became sources of envy and jealousy. Yet even the idea of blaming misfortune on the spirits has disappeared, discredited by Soviet atheist and scientistic propaganda, and rendered irrelevant by modernity. Who is to blame, then? Other humans; as the soaring accusations of witchcraft and curses observed in Mongolia and in Buryatia seem to demonstrate.[9] But not only that. Objects, behaviors, places, and physical phenomena too. Hence, a shaman from Ulaanbaatar blames the color of his client's spectacle frames for being the cause of her woes, and advises her to throw them away (Merli 2010: 157–62). In the numerous cases this author recounts, rites calling for luck or grace are advised. They presuppose the possible existence of impersonal forces, while suggesting at the same time that these are bound to remain blurry, like all the sources of luck dealt with above (see ch. 13). They express a way of thinking in which we find the remnants of a hunting lifestyle ideology, and the influence of contemporary ecological trends, each reinforcing the other. If there can be a chance of luck, it is necessarily linked one way or another to the natural world, and thus there is not enough for everyone.

The global consensus on the scarcity of natural resources, and on the need to preserve the environment, in addition to the collapse of the Soviet regime, helped to discredit the dream of continued progress, bringing the hunters' ancient principles back into the foreground, considered as they are to be environmental pioneers. Whether the topic is "respect for nature" or "harmony with nature," the principle applies to all that involves the external world. It brings with it a way of thinking that vaguely fills this external world with all kinds of

9. Humphrey (1997); Lacaze (1999); Merli (2010).

impersonal forces (currents, energies), perceived as potential factors of "something": we never really know what is of influence, but there is nothing, no object, no phenomenon, that is not thought of as being guided by an immaterial agent.

The field of play thus offers countless players countless ways of steering countless random events toward their own luck. But the latter, a prime example of a selective factor, is not in itself a source of power over others—neither today, nor in the context of our examples from former times. Only its redistribution can open up a gateway to a form of power, but without being enough to institutionalize this power.

OBTAINING POWER THROUGH COMPETITION

Within the very field of play, the other selection factor, cunning, occupies a key place in the games that comprise a publicly acknowledged internal sanction. Cunning sparks off a strategy, and the sanction it determines terminates the game. However, victory seems to lead to a mere "distribution of luck," and what is more, the winner fulfills this role of "distributor of luck" in a passive way: idly, he lets his admirers collect the sweat from his body (see chs. 13 and 14). So that a hierarchization process can occur, each wrestler's successive victories must be combined and institutionalized in the form of titles granted to them.

The comparative history of private games and public Games demonstrates this.[10] The presence of sanctions does not alter the private games' environment in any way whatsoever, because these sanctions have no statutory implications. The loser is neither eliminated from the game, nor even mocked. Custom requires him to carry out a "forfeit" (e.g., downing an entire bowl of fermented mare's milk) in order to be reinstated into the game. This drink "replenishes his body with vital strength," as Gaëlle Lacaze (2010) points out, for it was a lack of such strength that caused his defeat. For their part, the public Games underwent changes in their composition as sanctions became widespread and more widely acknowledged. The inclusion of horseraces in the organization of these Games provides an undeniable indication of these ranking tendencies.

10. The competitive aspect of the Buryat *Naadan* is particularly well depicted by Stefan Krist in his recently defended Ph.D. (see above, ch. 4 n. 2). The author shows how it evolved from pre-Soviet times up to the present, and through the Soviet era (ibid.: 243–63).

In its very principle, racing institutes a different type of internal sanction from wrestling, or any other dual game: the finish order determines a ranking of a finite number of participants. Since they rank without eliminating, races mostly constitute a *representation* of the notion of hierarchy, without being a ranking factor themselves. During the Mongol celebration of the Three Manly Games, it is not the riders—children of both sexes, too young (aged six to twelve) and too light to influence their mount's course—who compete, but the steeds and their trainers, who have spent months preparing them. It is the steeds that are ranked at the end of the race, and the praises sung are to their glory. In that they bring a certain know-how to light, the races are assessed above all as a technical event.[11] As if to highlight that the competitive aspect is not a core one, even the losing horse receives a prize and praise (ibid.: 16–24).[12] Likewise, in reindeer races in Chukotka, the first prize is not systematically awarded to the fastest one (Plattet, Vaté, and Wendling 2013: 485). Horseraces are not a tool for hierarchization in the ideological vector that Geser's epic represents for the Buryats either. This distinguishes it from the Tibetan versions of the epic, which, on the contrary, describe the hero Geser's victory in horseracing (open to men only) as qualifying him *directly* both for kingship and for marriage to the betrothed princess (Stein 1959: 359–60, 470–71). In Tibet, victory in competition is seen as proof of divine favor, and is worth qualification in principle.

FROM COMPETITION TO RANKING

If the inclusion of races in the Games can be seen as an indication of a ranking tendency, it is because wrestling and archery have a competitive aspect wherever a celebration brings together these three manly games. Whereas wrestling and archery only have, in principle, limited goals—victory over the rival, reaching the target—their successive results are aggregated. Wrestlers and archers are grouped in layered categories making up a pyramid, at the top of which there is only one supreme champion.[13] In other words, these two games, which, in

11. In chapter 8, we saw that they could also constitute a rite of passage for the riders.

12. Races have become the favorite game of country dwellers and women, Lacaze says, while wrestling remains that of city dwellers and men.

13. For the detail of these categories, see Lacaze (1999–2000). In any case, this does not prevent wrestlers from forming a sort of corporation. In September 2011, they

principle, represent qualifying trials for marriage, become qualifying trials for a higher social position when combined with horseracing.

The fact that this ranking tendency even incorporates a game with a dual structure, such as wrestling, reinforces the male orientation of play, other indications of which have already been put forward. Ultimately, it makes men the sole participants in the public Games. It is no coincidence that the mixed dances have been phased out of them little by little. And the fact that the epithet "manly," or, more precisely, "virile," appears in their official name[14] means that this is a deliberate and conscious orientation, because the term *naadan* (Mongol *naadam*) is etymologically based on the preludes to love. It is not surprising that archery, a hunter's skill, and a metaphor for male sexuality, became depreciated as soon as it was opened up to women. Altogether, this means that competition, and thus access to power, is a somewhat male concern.[15]

All our data confirms that, through the changes in the Games' composition, a change in society's organization becomes apparent, made clear by the emergence of a centralizing power. It affirms that the paths to power, and the very notion of competition itself, are intrinsically virile. Let us review the various changes that seek to do this.

In the Games, we have seen how the role of dancing faded in parallel to the decline in dependency on "unproductive" subsistence assets, and to the growing complexity of society, which organized the Games at higher socio-political levels (i.e., village, region, state). We have seen the role of repetitive gestures fade in favor of narrative songs,[16] and the role of animal imitation in favor of the specialization of human activities, and, finally, more recently, the elevation of sports over play.[17] And we have also seen, in similar fashion, the *mergen* (skillful

numbered 6002, coming from all over Mongolia to campaign for the inclusion of Mongolian wrestling in the *Guiness Book of World Records* (Cecensolnom, communication during the "Semaine de la Mongolie" conference, Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales, May 10, 2012).

14. The most common translation of these Games is the "Three Manly Games," but we could just as well have translated them as the "Three Virile Games." Stefan Krist (2015) opts for the "Three Games of Men".

15. The surge in female competitions in the realm of sports is quite recent. Let us also recall that Geertz (1973) interpreted cockfighting in Bali as an expression of bets on the human opponent's virility.

16. Throughout his *The passion of being an other*, Pierre Legendre (1978) claims that there is a sort of incompatibility between imitative repetition and modernity.

17. Games survive in modern societies by becoming sports (Camy 1995: 32).

marksman) model of the accomplished man fade in favor of that of the *bühe* (champion wrestler), lines of descent prevail over alliances, and accumulation supersede redistribution. Finally, the model of the shaman has given way to that of the leader, and the goal of harmony with nature to the goal of power within society. This tendency certainly explains why, since *The gift*, researchers have focused on the agonistic aspect of play, to the detriment of the nonagonistic (see above, ch. 5). However, even though competitive dynamics are crucial to all power rationale, they do not determine their outcome unequivocally. Seen from the perspective of the public Games, the competitive dynamics among the pre-Soviet Buryats leads neither to a kind of *potlatch*, nor to a state-like formation. In this segmental-type pastoral society, the nonagonistic component of the Games loses the importance it had in neighboring acephalous societies that live off hunting, but it does not disappear. In the post-Soviet context in which Buryatia asserts itself as a national Republic, it is significant that these Games have been reconstituted to include types of games devoid of internal sanctions, but organized as contests, as if the nonagonistic had, dare I say, been made agonistic.[18] As for the Three Manly Games which celebrate the central power in Mongolia, it is clear that they are solely agonistic.

. . . and from ranking to the centralization of power

Here, I would like to add that the prevalence of the goal of power in society over that of mastery of the natural environment can also be interpreted as the prevalence of space management over time management. The fact that this change is bringing about the decline of the shaman in favor of the leader, and therefore of the religious in favor of the political, is actually consistent with Max Weber's thoughts on the attribution of the relation to time to the religious element, and of the relation to space to the political element. In medieval times, Genghis Khan, once he became leader, undertook vast conquests, though not for lack of space in the Mongol steppe. The importance of the relation to space for a power that aims at centralization explains how horseracing was able to convey its inherent competitive aspect: racing metaphorizes the occupation of space.

18. The materials gathered by Stefan Krist and his own conclusions confirm this increasing competitive tendency (see especially 2015: 262). He mentions that round dances (*yeeher hatarha* in my spelling, *yokhor khatarkha* in his) have been included in the competitive framework of the "Three Games of Men" and that girls participate in wrestling tournaments (ibid.: 259–61).

Besides, the fact that Mongolia has transformed the Three Manly Games into its national holiday is a good example of Hocart's theory ([1936] 1970), linking the emergence of political power to the mastery of the celebration of renewal.[19] But not only that. By their very name, the Three Manly Games demonstrate the association of central power to virility in a noticeably conspicuous fashion. By their dual role of celebrating the nation and renewal, they convey a view which makes power over society and power over the natural environment depend on one other. Hence, there is a dual need for virility: as an expression of the competition rationale to its highest possible degree, and as an expression of the choice of the male position faced with the external world, inherited from the hunting legacy. Is it this dual virility concern which explains the "male privilege" highlighted several times above? The next chapter will question the privilege granted to men in the social order by the play rationale: Is it linked only to the exercise of virility, or does it relate to masculinity per se?

19. Liberalism has not changed this national holiday status linked to central power, but it has opened it up to female contests and games. Moreover, it has provoked an explosion of private games (see above, chs. 7 and 8).

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The privilege of virility

> The male element *does* [. . .] the female element *is*. Each male has a female component, and each female has a male component.
>
> – Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and reality*

From the beginning of our investigation into the Siberian Games, gender differences have proved to be one of their main aspects. One of the two main types of game is male only, and the other, mixed in principle, like the "dance of the capercaillie or wood grouse," is sometimes no more than a label attached to men facing each other, where the female role's sole purpose is to make the men look good (see above, ch. 9). The man—the male (no doubt the choice of the main imitated species, horned ruminants and wildfowl, is, in this respect, not incidental)—combines thus the mastery of the two basic relations, opposition and complementarity. When the hunter community makes an alliance with the spirits of wild species, it only views itself in a wife-taker's position. And when the whole society presents itself in its own eyes, and in the eyes of others, it is through the image conveyed by the "Manly" or "Virile Games."

A SANCTIONED AND DIRECTED ACT

Such asymmetry is due not only to the organization of the field of play, but to the very act of playing, which is in itself directed. This is quite apparent in the many languages in which the verb "to play" is transitive, and can therefore also be used in the passive form. Even though they have become somewhat old-fashioned, the French expressions *(se) jouer de quelqu'un*, meaning mocking or taking advantage of someone, and *avoir été joué par quelqu'un*, meaning having been fooled or deceived, are still understood nowadays, and sometimes taken as metaphors for sexual possession.[1]

A distinction we have seen to be relevant in the course of our inquiry, the presence of an internal sanction in play, appears to work in the sole favor of males. Incidentally, the male direction of internal sanction games gives emphasis to some oft-made comparisons, such as those demonstrated by the English terms "match" and "game," which refer *both* to the field of competition and to that of sexual activity.[2]

The history of our Games has shown that the growth of internal sanction games and the generalization of the competitive direction go hand in hand. The fact that internal sanction games have a male structure in the examples of the pre-Soviet era conceals the fact that the expansion of competitive dynamics hinges on the notion of internal sanction, and not on the male gender as such. Besides, nowadays, the games are still called "Manly" or "Virile" despite the fact that archery has been opened up to women in Mongolia, and that female contests are held in Buryatia. Furthermore, what the animal uses of the verbs meaning "to play" mainly evoke is sexual foreplay, as seen from a male perspective. And this foreplay is a sanction insofar as it results in the elimination of all rivals, and thus constitutes the condition for mating with the female. With regard to the act of play, the animal uses highlight a sexual model encompassing foreplay, and in the following, I will use the expression "sexual model"[3] in this sense. Relations between counterparts and between opposites also fall under this same umbrella term. Therefore, we may say that the privilege that the play

1. This could be linked to Georges Minois' (2000: 564) observation that a man disguised as a woman makes people laugh, but not a woman disguised as a man.
2. Moreover, the verb "to game" once meant "to hunt," "to manipulate," "to fool."
3. In particular, this sexual model should not be reduced to the phallic model sanctioned by psychoanalysis.

rationale confers upon the man does not exist for the purpose of dominating the woman. This privilege simply constitutes the quintessential selection tool among men, be it at a collective or individual level. Dominating the woman is simply a byproduct.

MECHANICAL MODEL, SEXUAL MODEL: CROSS-METAPHORS

Our analysis of the etymologies of "play" showed that the central core of this notion was the repetition of movement, and limitation in space. This has already been demonstrated by numerous authors, starting with Huizinga, and many elements of our data have confirmed it.

Caillois associates the topics with which some "to play" verbs can apply in this way: "[It applies] to gamboling, i.e., to the sudden and capricious movements provoked by a superabundance of gaiety and vitality. It applies equally to illicit[4] sexual relationships, the rise and fall of waves, and anything that undulates with the wind" (Caillois [1958] 1961: 27).

Köpping (1997: 21–22) also notes that play relates to back and forth, to the piston, and he makes perpetual motion its central notion. Like a clock, play creates a space outlined by movement, in which all differences are suspended. Hence, play is intrinsically liminal, and potentially transgressive; there can be no orthodoxy in playing.

These semantic associations of the notion of play encourage us to think of motion and the limited space in which it unwinds *in combination*. They make game, in the sense of "ease in the functioning of a thing or of several things between them,"[5] the basis of other meanings of this word listed before it. Jacques Henriot (1989: 86–87) is surprised, as too am I, that the meaning of "easy motion, moving freely" is only the twenty-sixth identified in the *Littré*. This author makes the just remark that this meaning is essential. He sees it as based on a "mechanical model."

4. Perhaps Huizinga can help us understand Caillois' use of "illicit." He wrote: "The term 'play' is specially or even exclusively reserved for erotic relationships falling outside the social norm. As we saw in Blackfoot, the same word *koani* is used for the ordinary playing of children and for illicit sexual intercourse" (1949 [1938]: 43).

5. "Aisance dans le fonctionnement d'une chose ou de plusieurs choses entre elles" (*Trésor de la langue française*).

> Doubtless the mechanical model is original and decisive. [. . .] It is the fundamental metaphor, the mother-image. [. . .] The sexual symbolism of games of assembly and fitting together [e.g., jigsaws], on which we sometimes insist, shows that play happens only when there is play (in the sense of slack). (Henriot 1989: 88–90)

Henriot's analysis of the uses of "playing" and "game" in French leads him to think that the sexual symbolism is of lesser importance compared with the mechanical model. Obviously, it can sometimes be difficult to tell, among images echoing each other, which is the metaphor for the other. In our case, despite what this author proposes, we cannot believe that the mechanical model is sufficiently universal to have been used as a basis for the development of such a notion, which itself is unanimously known to be universal. The sexual model, by virtue of its natural foundation and its presence in the animal kingdom, on the one hand, and by how it encompasses the two elementary types of relations, on the other, is surely a more appropriate guess.

Before Henriot, Huizinga also believed that the erotic use of the notion of play was metaphorical. He further considered that Germanic languages had a predilection for such a metaphor.

> All in all, therefore, and in marked contrast to the deep-seated affinity between playing and fighting, we feel compelled to regard the erotic use of the play-term, universally accepted and obvious though it may be, as a typical and conscious metaphor. (Huizinga 1949 [1938]: 43–44)

Nevertheless, Huizinga has just reasserted "the use of 'play' in the sense of limited mobility or freedom of movement," which he brought to light in his long linguistic overview at the beginning of that same chapter. Besides, he is troubled by his own approach. As soon as he notices that "love-play, the most perfect example of all play" applies to all that comes before mating, and not to mating itself[6]—leading him, like Henriot, to deem the erotic use of play metaphorical—he skips to another possible defining criterion, a definition by its opposite:

6. "It is not the act as such that the spirit of language tends to conceive as play; rather the road thereto, the preparation for and introduction to 'love', which is often made enticing by all sorts of playing. This is particularly true when one of the sexes has to rouse or win the other over to copulating [. . .] but it would be erroneous to incorporate the sexual act itself, as love-play, in the play category" (ibid.: 43).

he thinks that play and seriousness are antonyms, but this definition also goes on to bother him. Huizinga then draws the following conclusion: "Play is a thing by itself" (ibid.: 45).

The importance of the sexual reference in the notion of play is as obvious as its occultation in the Christian West. Perhaps it is this sexual reference, even limited to "love-play," which is the source of many uses of the verb "to play" across the world—starting with those applying to simple mechanisms, such as in the French expression *le jeu du piston* ("the piston's clearance"). These uses are metaphorical. The designation, in a fair number of languages, of the two parts of a mechanism as "male" and "female," respectively (starting with our electric plugs), is clear and unequivocal: the male part is always the active one. For the Buryats, the iron part of the lighter is the male one (it is called "father," and the tinder "mother"), as is the side of the divination scapula containing the backbone,[7] the fire drill bit for the Chukchi, the bow drill bit for the Inuit. In fact, the latter say of a pregnant woman that she "has been drilled" (Saladin d'Anglure 1978: 129). In this respect, the meaning of the term *tinku* for the Indians of Bolivia, highlighted by Antoinette Molinié (1988: 50–52), is particularly illustrative. Meaning to meet, to adapt, or to fight, *tinku*[8] also applies to the key and to its lock, to sexual intercourse, and to combat.

THE RITUAL STAGING OF GENDER COOPERATION

The presence of percussion instruments (drum,[9] rattle, bells . . .) in the ritual gear of the shaman, or of his counterparts across the world, could provide additional arguments with regard to this aspect, and so too could some rituals

7. I thank Agnès Birtalan for this 2011 clarification.

8. Let us recall that the term *tinku* refers to a great ritual, the Ecuadorian equivalent of which is called "play" (see above, ch. 1). Here, perhaps, we should understand sexual intercourse in the all-encompassing meaning pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, including foreplay, and therefore fights.

9. See ch. 8.The interpretation of the drum as the shaman's "mount" can be analyzed as the compounding of male domination, both over the woman he marries and over the animal he raises (Hamayon 1990a: 483–89). A brief comparative exploration shows that, in many societies with possession cults, the possessed is said to be both mounted by the god who possesses him or her, and positioned as his wife, whether the possessed is a man or a woman.

staging the complementarity between man and woman from an explicitly sexual point of view.

Hence, in the Altaian ritual Kocha-Kan, a masked character, armed with a big wooden phallus, behaves like a stud or stag in heat, and asks everyone to "play" with him: he puts his phallus between the men's legs, and his arm between the women's (Lot-Falck 1977b: 81, 83, and passim).

Bernard Saladin d'Anglure writes about the Inuit ritual of *Tivajuut*, one comprising tournaments of games of strength, masquerades, and an extensive exchange of wives, that one of its main characteristics is the "sexual grotesque."[10] During the Games, for the return of the sun at the winter solstice, all must smile by twisting their mouths, half the face is considered male, and the other half, the laughing or smiling one, female. Altogether, the face is typical of a dynamic of opposites (Saladin d'Anglure 1993: 167–68).

This ritual, I would rather say, had distinctive features of the *conjunction of opposition and cooperation relationships* inherent to the public Games in this kind of acephalous society, in which the staging always places the cooperation relationship under male domination. The fact remains, however, that, basing himself on the analysis of his Inuit data, Bernard Saladin d'Anglure (1978) concludes that the goal is to establish inequality between the genders, and, more precisely, to give precedence to men by justifying their domination over women.

FROM GAME WITH SANCTION TO POLITICAL POWER: AN IRRESISTIBLE SPREAD

The joint mastery of these two fundamental types of relations gives the male games' internal sanction all its meaning, and this, I insist, because of relationship structures, and not because of an intrinsic difference in the male sex as such. The internal sanction of the combat that selects between men makes this male peculiarity an asset in mixed games. Or rather, we could say, it encourages one to see cooperation relationships from a male point of view, that is, to include

10. The *Tivajuut* are two shamans. One of them wears the mask and gown of a woman, the other a set of oversized male genitalia. They hop into the igloo, and draw the men out by asking them with which of the women inside they want to sleep; in other words, they match couples. They must make people laugh. Yet in this frame, keeping a straight face is a sign of a long life, while laughter is a sign of imminent death (Saladin d'Anglure 1989: 143–55).

them in a structure ensuring the differentiation between men.[11] In other words still, given that it gives relationships between men an all-encompassing aspect, it falls on men to socialize the relationships between genders. This explains the lasting primacy of wrestling-type games in our Games. The term "sanction," which I have used, for lack of a better term, to indicate victory in wrestling, reaching the target in archery, or winning in a card game, thus applies, through the result of the game, to a kind of purpose for the act of playing that I would like to call *productive*. In this sense, the internal sanction somewhat foreshadows the fulfillment of what play merely "prepares," that is to say, marriage, as well as hunting in previous contexts, and beyond one another, perpetuation in every sense of the word. In short, the lesson consists in the fact that the presence of a differentiation between men within a group expresses, beyond a conjugal hierarchy, this group's mastery of its relations with all the "others," humans in other groups, animals, spirits. The Siberian hunting peoples thus have good reason to see themselves in the position of the "playing male," of the active player, when faced with animal spirits: for them, the model that they can apply in order to legitimate the rights of the human group over the wild world can only be that of the husband over his wife.

Like the changes in the Games' composition, those in the Buryat pastoral social organization, and their view of the entities ensuring their survival, can also be understood with reference to the role of the internal sanction. All these changes were destined to reduce the role of indeterminacy in their lives. And, in fact, they are consistent with an increase in security. For this reason, they have consisted in reducing alliance relationships with *others* treated as *equals* (therefore dance-type games, "love" between hunter and game animal), in order to develop dependence relationships with some of their own considered as superiors (hence internal sanction games, veneration of and obedience to the ancestors). These changes have resulted in the gradual erosion of the female image of the source of luck, to the benefit of the male image of the source of grace. In other words, security comes at the double cost of a stiffening of relations and a masculinization of the protagonists.[12] And it is also by their emphasis on the

11. According to a sociological study carried out in contemporary French middle schools by Sylvie Ayral (2011: 272), boys are punished four times more often than girls. They seek a sanction, which for them is a trophy; in that respect, punishment only strengthens the stereotypes of virility.

12. This partially aligns with one of the conclusions of Pierre-Joseph Laurent's analysis in his book *Imaginary beauties*, which I have summed up as follows: "[. . .] if it is the

internal sanction that the Games' composition raises virility to a sign of aptitude for political power.

In this respect, the contemporary meaning of "science" of the Mongol term *erdem* is significant: it is based on *er*, "male," equivalent to the Latin *vir*, the derivative of which, *virtus*, shifted from a sexual qualification (virility) to a political qualification (virtue), whilst passing through virtuosity and virtuality. Huizinga noticed the link from virility to virtue. And the link from "virtual" to both these notions is of great interest to Boellstorff. Seeing in this etymological link a reason to define *virtual* as the opposite not of *real*, but of *actual* (see above, ch. 3), Boellstorff highlights, on this subject, the proximity between the notion of "virtual" and that of "play." He also notes, in the distinction between *virtual* and *actual*, the echo of other "longstanding oppositions of mind versus body, object versus essence, and structure versus agency" (Boellstorff 2008: 18–19). It would be tempting to add to this list the relation between the shamanic ritual, a sort of preparatory virtual[13] hunt, and the hunting activity, which actualizes the ritual. The hunt for luck that the shaman plays with the female representative of the game-species' spirits (thus playing with a virtual partner in a virtual realm) foreshadows and determines the actual hunt that the hunter undertakes on an actual being in the actual realm.

Altogether, it is the rise of competitions enabled by the generalization of the principle of an internal sanction that has expressed, within the Games, the emergence of a centralizing power within society. And in order to support this emergence, the Games, formerly destined to give humans the advantage in their relation to the world, have instead become contests between humans.

On the relation between virile and virtual

The adjective *virtualis* emerges in the discourse of postmedieval Christian theology, in which it opposes actual, not real. It still does so today, in an age of new technologies in which "virtual realities" are frequent. In its 1694 edition, the

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case that there are no longer matrilineal societies turning down alliances, is that not because the emphasis on female beauty generates insecurity, whereas exchange and male domination offer security?" (Hamayon 2012c: 73).

13. The ritual hunt is fictional by nature and virtual by function, given that the shaman simulates the hunt and all its implications, in particular catching game and sharing it out.

Dictionary of the French Academy characterizes virtual as a "dogmatic" word, and defines it as follows:

> virtual is said of what is not properly and precisely a certain thing, but has the *force and virtue* of this certain thing; it is the opposite of formal and actual.

This definition makes it clear that *virtualis* refers to *virtus* as a latent, potential power in the religious sphere in which it was used at that time; it also helps to explain why "virtual" primarily applied to objects of religious thought. Horsfield (2005) argues that, in its very principle, religious thought creates an immaterial world to which it attributes a kind of reality, hence a kind of power liable to interfere with the kind of reality in which we live. In a sense, religion offers its followers a virtual space, where they can engage in virtual relationships with spiritual entities in order to obtain the latter's help in their real lives. Horsfield summarizes the matter as follows: the notion of virtual reality "aptly describes what theology seeks to do" (ibid.: 133). Virtual can be said to refer to what is thought to have the power or virtue to operate. Therefore, he adds, the virtual world cannot be separated from the world of bodily experience; it constantly interacts with it; and it often has even more influence on action and decision making than the material reality in which we are living. He then goes on to explain: in an actual situation, we generate virtual realities in order to locate and explore other possibilities as a basis for transforming the actual situation, or generating new actualities. When in a virtual reality, i.e., when dreaming, theorizing, or speculating, we want to actualize the virtual in acts of creation, as a means of concretizing the ephemeral. In virtual reality, Horsfield argues, we explore the possibilities of a situation in which our actual frustrations do not exist; and this gives us motivation and courage, although the virtual reality we explore does not yet exist, and may never exist.

What makes creativity possible is that virtual realities are not bound by the rules of a specific time or place. Furthermore, at least two conditions are needed for the virtual to help modify the actual: to be relevant, the virtual should have something *in common with* the actual; and to be perceived as offering possibilities beyond what is available in the actual, it should have something *different*, both in form and in content (ibid.: 137–40).

This requirement likens virtual realities to metaphors, which likewise should be both similar and different from what they refer to. This is why theology is currently defined as a science of the interpretation of metaphors. As Thomas Aquinas explained in his time, metaphors shift from one level of reality to

the next: they enable us to understand an abstraction by naming it after what is perceptible and empirically known, for instance by calling God a "lion" to make "almighty" more fathomable (Dahan 1992: 91–94). In their metaphorical use, words, gestures, and objects are released from spatial and time-based constraints, as are virtual realities. Furthermore, both creating a virtual reality and playing alike are thought to potentially interfere with the actual, by making people mentally explore possibilities to transform actual situations (Horsfield 2005) or positively anticipate the future, to recall once more the formulation adopted by Céline Petit (2009). In both cases, something resembling the attitude of a believer is required.[14]

While clearly relating *virtualis* to *virtus*, postmedieval theology apparently made no comment on the link of *virtus* to the Latin root *vir*, "male." The data examined here suggests that this derivational chain is not contingent. It has a faint echo in Mongol languages, as noticed above: the word *er*, "male," found in the names of the "Three Manly (or Virile) Games" (*Eriin Gurban Naadan* in Buryat, *Eriin Gurvan Naadam* in Mongol) is the root of *erdem*, a set of skills ("magic" in olden times, "science" today, hence *erdemten*, "scientist"); and the analysis of these Games has stressed how essential virility (as reference) and preparation (as aim) are to the very conception of playing. On this point, the meaning of the Latin terms is directly relevant. *Virtus* encompasses all "the qualities that make a man's value morally and physically,"[15] and *vir* specifically

14. All this calls for nuances with respect to both the scope of what is "virtual," and the relation of "virtual" to "actual." (1) If we consider that a saint and the hero of a novel are likewise virtual beings, we pray only to the saint, since only he is presumed to be able to answer. (2) We know that science fiction often inspires scientific and technological innovations, and we are well aware that a simple click on our computer may debit our bank account. (3) In contrast to rituals based on playing, the results of which depend on how they are performed, rituals that consist in applying an established liturgy are believed to operate automatically: they therefore allow no latitude, and bar any innovation or fortuitous change. Would the liturgical principle reduce the potential usefulness of the virtual spaces in question if they were considered from the functional perspective stressed by Horsfield? (4) Virtual can also be understood differently, as in an image currently used nowadays to explain the notion: "a seed is virtually a plant"; the "potential virtue" of the seed differs from that of virtual realities created by playing or religion, since it stems from deductive reasoning instead of metaphorical conceptualization—which reduces the speculative freedom that Horsfield attaches to virtual realities of a religious type.

15. For Latinist Anne Cauquelin, *virtus* can also be etymologically related to Latin *vis*, "violence."

applies to the *adult male*, relative to his status of *soldier* and *husband*, expected to be brave and strong. As a result, virtue, and even more so virility, are not innate, but rather acquired qualities, which remain potential as long as they are not actualized.[16] Furthermore, they require a thorough preparation.[17]

It is therefore fully understandable that in Mongolia a young man unable to wrestle may not be accepted as a husband, and that youngsters should go and wrestle on top of hills in the case of droughts. It explains why, in former hunting societies, such as the Tungus, young people would seize any opportunity to confront one another, with strength, skills, words, or anything else.

This also sheds light on the Mongolian and Siberian peoples' insistence upon the duty not only to play, but beyond that, to play as well as they can, in order to improve the quality of what they are preparing for, and to further develop discriminating games (the wrestling-type), as the history of their Games has shown. Victory in wrestling is what makes the wrestler's virtual quality fully actual. The stronger a power wants to be, the more discriminating factors matter. In short, both virile and virtual require intensive training in order to be able to operate.

Both "play" and "virtual" worlds share an ambiguous relation to empirical reality: the formula "as if" but "not quite" applies to both, and a potential preparatory "effect" on our perceptions and actions is attributed to both. According to our analysis, they both have a metaphorical structure (corresponding to the "as if"), and a certain latitude in realization (corresponding to the "not quite"). They can therefore retain similarities with the world of bodily experience, and overcome the constraints of time, space, matter (and other such elements) that bind it. This is why they offer room for adaptation, innovation, and, more broadly creativity, on the one hand, and have a potential religious dimension, on the other hand.[18]

16. There seems to be no similar concept for adult females in the ideology of play among the Buryats. However, the question should be investigated further, particularly in relation to the notion of "motherhood."

17. Biologically speaking too, virility is somewhat virtual; spermatozoa are produced by a man during his adult life, and are thus constantly renewed (whereas the egg cell stock is set during the embryo's development). And later they will compete to fertilize one of the eggs.

18. Let us recall that playing is restricted to religious practices addressing spiritual entities conceived as being on an equal footing with human beings. Conversely, playing is incompatible with doctrinal forms addressing transcendental entities to be obeyed and worshiped; as a rule, the virtual worlds created by doctrinal religions do not leave much room for innovation.

Terrestrial or transcendent, power is virile and feminizes the dominated

For their part, possession cults follow a different path. Play remains a male privilege, but not that of the human male. Analysis of these cults shows two meaningful differences with the Siberian model of the Games. These differences both result from the fact that the "possessed," man or woman, acts not in the name of the humans, like the shaman, but in the name of the god who "possesses" him or her, often perceived as his or her invisible "husband": "the god sits," participants say with reference to the possessed, or "the god plays," "the god dances." One of these differences is organizational: the possessed cannot lead the ritual, since he or she no longer exists as a human, because of his or her function. Usually perceived as a male function, the organizational task requires the presence of another human actor, cult leader, musician, or otherwise.[19] The other difference is metaphysical, and concerns humanity's relationship to the world. Organizing the economy leads society to depend on superior immaterial entities. It is noteworthy that the latter are usually male figures of human or humanized origin. Depending on their ancestors was the Buryat herdsmen's solution. It eliminated any relationship based on play.[20] Depending on a spiritual "husband," a solution which many possession cults illustrate, preserves play,[21] but also inverts it.

Among the Hinduized Magar of Nepal, the ritual specialist calls some spirits *purus*. "They play in our body." Yet *purus*, meaning "man," "soul," can also designate divinities as they possess a subject, and is interpreted as "the male principle which seeks to incarnate [. . .] itself in the shaman [the possessed]" (Lecomte-Tilouine 1993: 339 n. 2).

In Burma, the cult of the thirty-seven *naq*, local entities to which a decisive role in the formation of royalty is allocated, is ensured by the possessed, men or women, called *naguedo*, a derivative of *naq* meaning "*naq*'s wife"; the incarnation of the *naq* in his "wife" is manifested in her dancing, to such an extent that the mere fact of dancing is interpreted as possession; the cult's key role belongs to

19. In Japan, a manager controls the possessed woman's oracular activity (Bouchy 1992).

20. See ch. 13. Among the Buryats, only men could perform ancestor rituals; but inheritance of the shamanic "essence" being bilinear, there were female shamans who performed private rituals, most often in the name of a personal relationship with the souls of the human dead; but they never were seen as their "wives."

21. There are humanized male ancestors of animal origin, but no animal spiritual "husbands," or at least I have not met any.

the musicians who "play the part of men" (Brac de la Perrière 1989, 1994: 183, 2009).[22]

But things often are not as clear and simple.

In the movie *Eyes of stone*, about possession in Rajasthan, that Martine Van Woerkens (1992) analyzes, the verb *khelna-*, "to play," applies both to the possessed woman when she goes to the temple, and to the goddess she embodies in private circumstances. The goddess then complains through the mouth of the possessed: "I am your un-wed self."

The Korean verb *nolda-* also seems subject to several uses. "Let the ancestors play" is the title and leitmotiv of a chapter of Seong-Nae Kim's (1989) book; an applicant must "play well" during her initiation ritual to become *mudang* (Kendall 1993); but what is said about an unmarried girl can also be said about her, namely, dare I say, that she has not yet been "made to play."

Unlike the shaman, the possessed usually officiates within a group, and possession rites do, generally speaking, not hold a "central" social position. These rites are seldom performed in the name of the entire community, and are seldom the only ones to be performed in its name.[23] Ioan Lewis (1971) thus describes them as "peripheral."

From husband to father

Possession cults mainly develop on the periphery of ancestor cults, on the one hand (with which they sometimes merge, like among the Yoruba, for whom the ancestors are also the spiritual "husbands" of the possessed), and of world (or salvation) religions, on the other. Among these, the notion of the one God in the Abrahamic religions marks an ontological breach leading to the impossibility, at least in principle, of any possession, or any relationship involving any kind of "playing." These religions give pride of place, however, to the notion of alliance, which sees itself written with an upper case A: Alliance between Yahweh

22. We could find similar data in Leiris (1980 [1938]); Métraux (1955); I. M. Lewis (1971); Bouchy (1992); Boyer-Araujo (1993); Duchesne (1996); and many others.

23. There is such a variety of situations that it is impossible to simplify more, especially with regard to the two following points: the individual or collective aspect of the relationship between "husband and wife" (do all the possessed of the same cult have the same spiritual "husband," or do they each have their own?); and the private or public aspect of the rituals (do possession cults carry out periodic rituals comparable with renewal rites?).

and the people of Israel in the Bible; Alliance between Allah and the *umma*, the community of believers; Alliance between Christ and his church. In all three religions, there is clearly a matrimonial model.[24] But the human partner is collectively raised to a mystical, fictitious person placed as God's "wife." And this obviously limits the ambit of the conjugal metaphor.[25]

Besides, increasingly obviously throughout history, this alliance relationship is coordinated with a vertical relationship, often perceived and experienced as a filiation, as shown by the Christian expression "God the Father." The human community thus faces a double dependency, doubly compelled to obey and submit. And the same goes for political power when it joins forces with religious power, like in medieval France. Just as Christ is the "'husband' of the Christian church," so the king of France is the "husband of his kingdom" (Kantorowicz 1989 [1957]: 802–17). God also being a "father," the king can further become the father of his people. It is interesting that both these relations are expressed with the vocabulary of parenthood, as the relationships with the spirits of wild species, and those with the ancestors were in our previous examples. The ontological breach that characterizes the monotheistic God does not prevent the application of parental metaphors, but it completely hinders any use of the notion of "play."[26]

ON THE USEFULNESS OF MOVEMENT AND DISTANCE

Therefore, the sexual direction of the play notion explains how it is a reference of the hierarchical order per se, and how it can be the basis of the principle of

24. For certain sides of this question, see Hamayon (1998a, 2007).

25. The conjugal metaphor, widespread throughout the Bible, is found in Christianity among the great mystics. We can consider that the notion of Alliance is also expressed, in Christianity, in the ritualized wedding during a nun's veil-taking ceremony.

26. From this point of view, Nietzsche's two famous sentences are especially relevant: "God is dead" and "I would believe only in a god that knows how to dance." Specifically relevant, also, are the Bible's mention of David's "dance" before the Ark, and the mixed feelings that it arouses in 2 Samuel 6 :14–16: "David [. . .] was dancing before the Lord with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets. As the ark of the Lord was entering the City of David, Michal, daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart" (New International Version).

internal sanction's growth. Given how the growth of this principle goes hand in hand with that of social stratification, the play notion, on the one hand, and the power notion, on the other, can only be "virilized" all the more. But can it account for the fact that play constitutes a specific field or realm, defined in negative terms, and which refers to another field or realm? In other words, can it explain why "play" always has some aspect of it that is different from current reality, "not ordinary," or even somewhat "ritual"? Can it explain why "playing" is credited with a possible effect on empirical reality? I would like to be able to demonstrate that these questions may have their answer in an understanding of "play" that combines its two main aspects: the production of a repeated movement in a limited space with a certain latitude, according to its recurring etymologies, and the creation of a frame in which the constitutive acts do not indicate what they would indicate in nonplay, according to Bateson's definition. This definition means that we must consider play a metaphorical mode of action, as a mode of action using its own flexibility to an end other than that which constitutes it as play.

This last assertion needs to be explained. Such is the goal of the final chapter. Before starting it, let me recall the key findings of the present one: the sexual reference of this rhythmical movement, direct or not, conscious or not; and its utilization in the process of hierarchization within the social order. Indeed, the latter accounts for the universality of the "play" notion in human cultures. It also explains why the play notion is so widely applied everywhere in the world, to both humans and animals alike, but also why it extends to natural phenomena, objects, and relationships. In this respect, "playing" really constitutes a "pivotal" category, linking the social and the natural, as Klaus-Peter Köpping (1997: x–xii) says, but this pivotal category "links" *more* than the social and the natural, because it can also "link" species between themselves, and, in a more abstract fashion, partners of different natures (like the shaman and the spirits, the little girl and her doll, or the nomad and his jacks).

. . . and on the interdependence of dynamism and alterity

The sexual reference of play also highlights the fact that a relation of alterity is inherent to the notion of "play." A passage in François Jacob's book *The possible and the actual* demonstrates its importance from a more ambitious and unchallenged perspective.

> How is it that, in the human body, reproduction is the only function to be performed by an organ of which an individual carries only one half so that he has to spend an enormous amount of time and energy to find another half? [. . .] Why do most animals and plants have to be two in order to produce a third one? [. . .] We have to be two to generate a third one so that the third one can be a "different," an "other." (Jacob 1982: 6)

Basically, what François Jacob is saying is that sexual reproduction enables us to "make others," and this ensures ongoing evolution. Our Games encourage us to think that it combines with selection between males, like the dance type combines with the wrestling type. Without being so bold as to attribute this biological blatancy to the field of play, I believe that we can find in it material to better grasp the interdependence between *movement* and *rhythm* in play, and the *alterity* of space that it requires in order to repeat itself with a certain latitude. In a way, this other space assumes the position of a partner in movement. This interdependence between dynamics of action and alterity between partners allows for indefinite innovation.

In another way, this biological model can perhaps shed light on the idea that, other than the "doing" constitutive of this play, there really is a "doing" at the outcome of this play, a doing something else and otherwise, different from its "ordinary meaning," to quote Huizinga once more. François Jacob's "making others" would then relate to having an "effect" within the field of empirical reality, in which we can see an external sanction of the act of playing. This suggests that we pursue our line of questioning, in the abstract, regarding this interdependence between action dynamics and partner alterity: can it be the source of the specificity of play as a modality of action? The purpose of the final chapter is to assess this question. The question of action dynamics will be rephrased, in light of the fact that playing acts, given that they do not account for what they are, can account for something else; it will be rephrased according to the notion of metaphor, which also refers to something other than what it says. Or, to put the question yet another way, can we give a full account of playing based on a certain relationship between two notions: *margin* and *metaphor*?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Taking advantage of the gap
Margin and metaphor

> [. . .] the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence [. . .] for in these days illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness.
>
> – Ludwig Feuerbach, Preface to *The essence of Christianity*

Our journey through the various dimensions of the notion of play has led us almost full circle. The interdependence between action dynamics and the actors' alterity—as the previous chapter sought to show—appears as an abstract version of the tangible reference with which our journey through the dimensions of play started: the idea of a rhythmical movement in limited space, aiming at having an "effect" in another realm of reality. In this final chapter, I would like to offer another—abstract—version of this interdependence, based on the notions of margin and metaphor, the properties of which sometimes overlap.

The example of the piston gives a fair idea of the margin notion. In our examples, margin corresponds both to the repeated movement's permitted latitude in the limited space in which it can be carried out, and to the relative interpretational freedom it benefits from given the fact that it is imitative (each time, it may and must be neither exactly the same, nor exactly another). It is thus doubly at the source of the random outcome of this movement, and allows its endless renewal. It is the ideal place for individual agency to express itself, and for the variations it generates.

I will define what I mean by metaphor below (shorthand for metaphorical structuring, or metaphorization). On initial examination, it is to be understood as not meaning what it says by referring to something else (a "fount of knowledge"—a wise person—cannot be drunk from); it therefore echoes the Batesonian definition of play which has served as the basis of the reflection carried out in this book.

The margin notion can easily be understood, since it is often designated, in French, for instance, by the word "play" itself: *jeu, marge de jeu* (leeway). That of metaphorical structure requires more explanation, however. This chapter will try to show how these two notions mutually imply each other as a structure, and as the flexible element enabling operation (and which we could define as the players' agency). Taken together, these notions account for every one of the dimensions tackled in the previous chapters, and for all of them as a whole. Ultimately, it will likely become apparent that it comes down to the logic of play that the notion of play and the combined notion of margin and metaphor overlap in many languages.

MARGIN AS A FUNCTIONAL CONDITION

The margin or leeway notion—which, by its very flexibility, allows a mechanism or a relation to operate—almost goes without saying, in fact, since there are so many fields in which it can be relevant: technical, social, concrete, abstract . . . The term play (as in free play) is, in many languages, frequently used to designate numerous mechanisms: a piston needs a little free play (but not too much), as do cogs and door hinges. There can be no negotiation without latitude (the strategic rivalry between the British Empire and the Russian Empire for supremacy in Central Asia was called the Great Game), and no conversation without room for interpretation. Furthermore, it is often said that semantic ambiguity is crucial to mutual understanding, and playing on words is both

widespread and valued. But this margin, or this latitude, which is a paradigmatic space for individual or collective agency, can only operate within a frame in which there is at least implicit consensus. Being the space wherein agency occurs, the margin is thus the root of play's indefinitely innovative aspect. It is also, thanks to the inherent possibility of its exploitation, what enables the existence of an internal sanction (as defined in ch. 5). Hence, it is vital to one feature of play, its uncertain result, and to its corollary, the very idea of a stake (*enjeu* in French, literally an "in-game") of play.

METAPHOR AS A STRUCTURING CONDITION

The plurality of these examples, echoing the many meanings of play indexed in the dictionaries of languages throughout the world, implies that we should interpret them as metaphorical uses of the play notion, as Huizinga, Caillois, and many others have done (and not as signs of alteration, as Huizinga also wrote). Among them, Jacques Henriot holds a prominent position. He is struck by the overabundance of such uses in French, and focuses on metaphor in his book *Under the guise of playing*, which he subtitles "the ludic metaphor." He seems to be the first and only author to make this notion the essence of playing. His approach gathers its momentum from analysis of the many expressions which make social life a game, and game the "core instrument of organized action," according to his quotation of the works of Crozier-Friedberg (Henriot 1989: 36). It leads him to characterize play as a "metaphorical process," a term he explains in the last page of his book, for "[insufficiently] patient readers":

> We call "playing" *any metaphorical process stemming from the sustained decision to implement a more or less coordinated group of patterns perceived as random in order to realize a deliberately arbitrary theme*. (Henriot 1989: 300)

Henriot approaches play as a modality of action, and considers it from the perspective of the mental attitude of he who sees his own action as a game. The range of opportunities to consider what one does as a game is so broad that Henriot goes on to affirm that "the game plays life [. ..] and life plays the game," and that "a game is modeled on a reality which, in turn, is modeled on that game," for there is, after all, a "structural homology" and an ever-possible "reversibility of the *as if*" (ibid.: 54–63).

On the one hand, it is difficult to derive these generalizations from the "mechanical model" of the piston, acknowledged by the author as a crucial and deciding factor (ibid.: 88). On the other hand, and above all, these statements suggest that, according to Henriot, almost anything could be play or a medium for play, and that the user alone is allowed to assess its value as an object of play (ibid.: 102–3). This is what leads him to think that anyone who, momentarily, cuts him- or herself off from the real world can be called a player (ibid.: 209). This approach draws our attention to the importance of the metaphor concept, but is questionable in several ways. While the author acknowledges the universality of metaphors (ibid.: 82–83), and the plurality of play forms, his claim relies almost exclusively on examples derived from French uses of play and game (seldom does he use English or German). Too influenced by the Western view of play as an entertaining, free, and gratuitous action, he rejects Mauss' view of the *potlatch* as play, because participants are forced to participate in it (ibid.: 114–15). Not having the choice of not playing is unacceptable to him. But it is mainly in the understanding of metaphors that my approach and his differ.

METAPHORICAL STRUCTURING: A TOOL OF THOUGHT

I will attempt to give the process of metaphorical structuring a central place in the study of play on different bases, in relation to the concept of margin. First of all, let us recall the definition on which I rely. The reason for this choice comes down to the fact that this definition is constructed not from a rhetorical perspective (which would be pointless here), but from that of the cognitive process involved. It is also due to the limiting methodology implied by the underlying theory. This is the definition that linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson develop at the beginning of their book *Metaphors we live by*, which played a seminal role in cognitive studies:

> The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing or experience in terms of another. (1980: 5)

This is the starting point of their book's main argument, unraveling both a theory and a method, thus forming an elegant (as mathematicians would say) approach to this fundamental cognitive process that metaphorical structuring embodies in their eyes. Metaphor, as these authors demonstrate, "is not just a

matter of language, but of thought and reason."[1] It operates at the very roots of our thought processes. Therefore, it also operates in other systems of expression than language: be they gestural, visual, or graphic . . . Both a conceptual tool and a thinking technique, metaphorical structuring guides the interpretation of experience, and shapes behavior.

Working as a true leitmotiv, their leading idea is that "our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature,"[2] thus enabling inferences (ibid.: 3 and passim). The economist Mirowski (2004), for instance, agrees with this: according to him, all economic systems are expressed by metaphors. To make sense, everything must be integrated into metaphorical conceptions; and he adds that there is a feedback process from metaphors to concepts. According to this author, this also goes for mathematics. Economics uses particular types of metaphors, which are limited in number in each historical period. These metaphors encompass and reorganize experience. This is also what immunologists believe, for they express viral attacks and the body's natural defense mechanism in military terms. As for specialists of virtual environments, such as computer games or the internet, they deliberately exploit the properties of spatial metaphors, because they have noticed that users behave in the same way in both virtual and real worlds. It is a well-known fact that spatialization is an elementary metaphorical structuring, if not the cornerstone of all metaphorical structuring, for it is linked to the fact that we have motor skills and senses. All kinds of secondary metaphorical structures can attach themselves to it, as when we *approach* a problem from a certain *angle*, and by *taking a step back*.

Metaphorical structuring as a fictional creation

Going so far as to say that we perceive and understand our experiences only insofar as we insert them into a structure—and that the latter, notably in cultural and religious fields, is metaphorical—would not, I think, constitute a betrayal of Lakoff and Johnson.[3] Nor indeed would it be a betrayal to consider that meta-

1. This is why it is obviously not a matter of rhetoric.
2. "[. . .] most of our normal conceptual system is metaphorically structured" (ibid.: 56).
3. According to the authors, "The conceptual systems of cultures and religions are metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980 : 40).

phorical structuring, as they define it, as a fictional creation, is the counterpart in the field of thought to play in the field of action. (This is what forms the basis of the metaphorical uses of play.)

A brief answer to some criticisms of the concept of metaphor

Before exploring the mechanism of metaphorical structuring such as Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate it, let us recall that the latest cognitivist schools of thought bar the notion of metaphor from their approach to cultural and religious representations,[4] their goal being to assess the brain's production processes. For some of them, the grounds for rejection is that a metaphor is "aware of itself," which is contrary to the proper functioning of symbolic processes. In his review of works and studies on this matter, David Lehmann (2005) sums up Pascal Boyer's (2001: ch. 4) position, using the following question: Why do people attribute the interruption of such and such a misfortune in their lives to a punishment on behalf of their ancestors, if they are aware that their ancestors do not really exist, while at the same time they easily make the connection between this misfortune and the fact that they have infringed a social rule? In order to answer this question, Boyer, to explain "religious ideas," calls upon a "propensity" to attribute intentions and interactions, and upon systems of inference to explain the thought sequence. Lehmann notes that Scott Atran (2003) also calls upon a "propensity," behind uncertain situations with imperceptible causes, to look for an "end-oriented agency."

But is it so certain that a metaphor is "aware of itself"? According to Lakoff and Johnson, we use metaphorical phrasings to speak about abstract things simply because we have no other ways of speaking about them, and we do so without being aware of it. Besides, we often need the intermediary of a bewildered foreign speaker to realize the metaphorical nature of certain words. Moreover, it would be tempting to say that, if there is a propensity to attribute intentions and actions to imaginary agents, it is precisely because, in order to think them, we use terms that we also use for humans, that is, because we use metaphors. Is it not rather a propensity for metaphorical structuring, the latter allowing, in this case, with regard to these imaginary agents, the common inferences involved in human interaction?

4. This is an odd rejection given that these authors willingly speak of metadiscourses and metacommunication.

Roger Keesing (1985) tackles metaphor from a different perspective. He is critical not so much of its existence, but rather of the interpretations that can be drawn from it. Some of them are indeed "loaded," and overinterpreting them would be doing the work of an excessive "cultural theologian." Despite this risk of overinterpretation, however, we must not forget that the status of "representations" (such as religious ideas) is, by definition, different from that of empirical data. Were we to deny this difference in status, from the cognitive point of view, between representations and data-supported experience, they would be impossible to analyze.

The experiential foundation of metaphorical structuring

One of the advantages of Lakoff and Johnson's approach is its explanatory power. Metaphorical structuring, they say, consists in ascribing—besides the intuitive meaning of a thing we experience—the implications of this meaning (the inferences it potentially allows) to an abstract thing, namely what this meaning can lead to, or what it can be linked to in the corresponding empirical realm.

Metaphorical structuring enables the coherent structuring of an experience or of a series of experiences. It applies first and foremost to our bodily experience and to our experience of objects in the outside world. However, in Lakoff and Johnson's assessment, it does not depend on objective similarities: "The only similarities relevant to metaphor are *similarities as experienced by people*. [. . .] Things in the world do play a role in constraining our conceptual system. But they play this role *only through our experience of them*" (1980: 154).

Generally speaking, metaphors in relation to a specific field make up coherent systems, according to which we conceptualize our experience;[5] for entire fields of experience are concerned, along with their interactions, and not isolated concepts.

Moreover, there are constant and reciprocal inductions made between thought and experience. Metaphorical structuring arises from experience, and our real-life experience is in turn conditioned by metaphors. Our way of saying, for instance, that a debater "attacks" or "targets" his opponent's position leads us to perceive discussion as a sort of war (argument means reasoning, statement for or against, and quarrel). The inferences that a metaphor allows encourage us to interpret and guide the interpretation, and the latter can suggest a mode of

5. In a previous collaborative work driven by Lakoff and Johnson's method, we sought to bring to light this aspect of a coherent system regarding metaphors using body parts (Beffa and Hamayon 1989).

action.[6] In short, resorting to something tangible or well known is what allows us to think something that is not so, and possibly to manipulate it: in this way, the positive landing of the divinatory drumstick (ch. 12) is a metaphor for the seizure of luck. There is an inference from the fact that the hollow side of an object forms a container. The landing hollow side up evokes the ability to receive, and from there, the reception of a good, and the received good. There is, altogether, between what metaphorizes and what is metaphorized, a difference in field or realm (and a difference in status) recalling the difference between the realm of play (or ritual) and that of empirical reality to which play (or ritual) refers.

"The partial nature of metaphorical structuring"

This metaphorical value is only partial.[7] The hollow side of the drumstick is not a container when used to beat the drum. And its landing right side up is a metaphor for luck only when the drumstick is ritually thrown by the shaman. This partial aspect, since it is selective and linked to the context, is a particularly useful property of metaphorical structuring. The choice of a metaphor for a given context in which it structures a thought process thus occurs to the detriment of other possible metaphors, which could be suitable for other contexts; no metaphor can be extended *ad infinitum* or exclude any other metaphors. Therefore, the shamanic ritual called upon the terms of social relations among humans to think and live, during the time of the ritual, the relationship of humans to the wild species' spirits, but the metaphorical structuring considered solely the social aspect of things. By contrast, the ritual took care not to use the terms necessary for human counting to anticipate the spirits' reactions to the shaman's promises: it promised human deaths, but without specifying how many.

Constraints of metaphorical structuring

The former public Games drew their inspiration from partial and selective animal models; and only certain movements of certain animals—well known by

6. For the Tungus Evenk, the more a shaman uses metaphors, the more the ritual will be efficacious (Lavrillier 2013: 274, referring to Keptuke).

7. "The primary function of metaphors is to provide a partial understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience. This may involve preexisting isolated similarities, the creation of new similarities, and more" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 154).

the hunters—were imitated. Alexandra Lavrillier, upon returning from a stay with the Evenk of south Yakutia, shows how the capercaillie's courtship ritual is conceptualized as a *dance* in the very frame of experience, and how this dance, in the hunters' eyes, illustrates the fact that victory over a rival is the requirement for access to females:[8]

> The capercaillie hunt happens during the mating season, between late April and late May. The Evenk relentlessly praise the beauty of these birds. They do not say "we are going to hunt it" but we are going to "do the capercaillie" (a verb formed around the capercaillie's name), and do not speak about combat but about dance. Some hunters say they have forgotten to fire shots, being too absorbed by the dance. The capercaillie is the first to announce the arrival of true spring. The males always gather in the same areas and at the same times. The first come are perched atop the trees and call one another out for combat by uttering their strange ragged cry. Opponents settle on the ground. Wings and tail spread, they face each other, scream, and deal each other blows with their beaks, until the weakest flies away or dies. Then come the females, with other cries; they absorb the male's sperm and go bury their eggs around the trees. (Lavrillier 1995: 51–52)

However, it is quite rare for the experience to be lived simultaneously as an experience and through society's conceptualization of it, both feeding off each other.

Such a significant coincidence, and, conversely, the impossibility of linking a given conceptualization to any experience whatsoever, may tempt us to claim the metaphor's "principle of reversibility," as Henriot does (1989: 92). War or game of strategy, which is the model, and which is the reference item, this author asks:

> The ever-possible reversibility of the *as if* has to do with the structural homology (which must be objectively analyzed) between a kind of behavior usually called playful and the other. Metaphor works in both ways. First of all, play is presented as a way of acting which mimes or simulates something "real"; then we come to think that reality itself must be understood from our own idea of play. The game then becomes a model. (Henriot 1989: 54–55)

8. It is a hopping dance, in which two crouching men face each other while a woman revolves around them.

Admittedly, there are reversible metaphors, but taking into account the inferences of a given metaphor and of the conceptual systems to which it belongs enables us to delineate its uses. Lakoff and Johnson delineate in this way the inferences of the metaphor expressed by "time is money," to which we spontaneously link the idea that time is valuable, and that we should not squander it. But the comparison is flawed as soon as we want to save it up, like we do for money.

> [. . .] time isn't actually money. If you spend your time trying to do something and it doesn't work, you can't get your time back. There are no time banks. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 13)[9]

This also goes for many so-called religious metaphors, often quoted as examples of reversibility. While we may say "God, our Father," we may not say that we are equally "likened" to the first and the second term of the equation.

ALTERITY AT THE VERY BASIS OF METAPHORICAL STRUCTURING

Lakoff and Johnson's approach has an additional merit: it highlights another implication of metaphorical structuring. While what structures and what is structured are bound to be different, the degree of acceptable otherness is not unlimited: the "other" must be close enough to allow comparison, and different enough to ban identification. In other words, metaphorical structuring enjoys a margin, but this margin is narrow. Our Games also serve to illustrate this point: the dancers' jumps and the wrestlers' head-butts do not mimic the behavior of the species chosen as models, but allude to them enough to make the inspiring context come to mind. The conjunction of a metaphorical structuring and of an operating range thus constitutes a particular way of dealing with the relation to reality. We can view the latter from two standpoints: that of play, and that of belief.

9. Thus, only the "'useful'" part of a metaphorical concept is kept: we can talk about a mountain's "foot," but not about its arm.

From the standpoint of play

The distancing mechanism born of imitation is easily recognized in metaphorical structuring: the imitating movement is not the imitated movement. In fact, it is because imitation is metaphorical that it is able to prepare and to prepare *something other* than what the model performs. Because it prompts the attribution of the implications of the imitated animal movements to the human movements that imitate them, imitation makes these implications relevant to society itself. And this is how animal behaviors—from which dances, fights, and defensive or preservative behaviors draw their inspiration—can become a medium for the identity ideals of a human community. But the Games, as we have seen, have not stopped changing in their form, nor in the values they convey. The variations noted—variations in content (the integration of nonphysical games, for instance), in form (recourse to sound or image rather than movement), and in reach (local, regional, or national)—have provided opportunities to take advantage both of the margin in the operation of play, and of the partial and selective aspect of its metaphorical structuring.

From the standpoint of belief

Metaphor is often blamed for its falsehood. In particular, believers refrain from using this notion about their beliefs, because, as they say, they "*really* believe." Yet metaphor is by nature both *false and valid*. It only acquires meaning in the conceptual system that uses it constitutively, and to which it claims to adhere. It does not hide, and does not seek to deceive: the conspicuously stylized iron antlers on the shaman's crown do not pretend to be a cervid's true antlers. As a belief content, a metaphor makes sense to the person who believes in the system to which it belongs, but is nonsense for those who do not. Generally speaking, general compliance with a system is possible without a dogmatic compliance with each and every metaphor which expresses it. In the case of a ritual like the type of shamanic ritual under examination, compliance with the system appeared to be both essential to participation in the ritual, and liable to be disregarded outside of it; it was found that compliance with the system itself mattered less than the way the shaman brought it into existence (ch. 12).

Besides, this explains precisely how believer and player may be both "knower and dupe" (and hence diminishes the relevance of a definition of play based on the players' awareness of their playing). This also explains, more specifically,

how a believer may swing between doubt and belief, or how a specific idea may earn one's adherence, and another's skepticism or indifference. This also enables us to understand how others may support an idea that we do not ourselves agree with, or, conversely, how we may support ideas that others reject. And finally, this is why a metaphor, like a belief content, can be a cause of misunderstandings between members of different cultures. But from another point of view, the very validity bestowed upon a belief content can be embarrassing for he who endorses it. Each hunter learns the need to be watchful; in particular, he is cautious not to "offend any spirits." If, inadvertently, he lets an unfortunate gesture slip, he becomes panicked. If he believes the precautions he has taken to be valid, then he must fear retribution (every belief content has an underside). It would sometimes, therefore, be easier not to support common representations.[10]

Our Games are the quintessential frame for the activation of such a support or adherence; its activation is part of the "preparation" for hunting, but in principle ceases for the hunter with his first shot the following day. We could describe the game and the ritual as fictional frames outlining a sphere of active support. However, while this is acknowledged (the field of reality created by this fictional frame is usually not confused with that of empirical reality), practice will have instilled the conveyed ideas into the players. These ideas will form part of a cognitive capital that the duty of playing during the Games will have instilled; and thus they may be liable to spring up outside the appointed frame. And the by definition contingent aspect of these recurrences results in a lack of possible reparative responses for staving off afterward the risks created by unfortunate gestures.

REALIZATION

In many cases, ritual practices are supposed to influence realities only when they are performed according to prescribed gestures and the conventional props. Tangible or physical elements express representations: the drumstick's fall realizes the idea that an invisible agent has guided it, and that it is a sign of luck. And conversely, something must actually happen in order to prove that, behind

10. I thank Grégory Delaplace for drawing my attention to this fact.

this or that representation which is an object of belief, "there actually is a reality," as Nathalie Luca (1994) puts it in her study of a Korean sect led by a "Messiah." The latter uses soccer as the reference for the doctrine he offers his followers. He makes them play the game, and plays it himself: depending on the situations from which he wants to draw lessons, he puts the followers either in the position of a player, or in that of the ball. The soccer metaphor provides a tangible illustration of its tenets. In turn, this metaphorical structuring creates an expectation of "miracles" from a follower's point of view: they believe these "miracles" prove that soccer is not merely a metaphor. And this expectation of "miracles" is the root of the followers' compliance with the Messiah's speech, and of the latter's power over his followers.[11]

In short, there must be something concrete to create expectations, and this concrete something must have a metaphorical nature with respect to these expectations, as wrestling and dancing gestures do with respect to encountering game during a hunting expedition. Game, however scarce, must come toward the hunters in order to validate their expectation's underlying belief. Also, the Games and the hunting party make up an exemplary set of this relation between "play" and its expected "effect." They link the belief in the power of "play" to favor the hunting season to the fact that the metaphorical structuring on which it is based (the idea of an alliance and of an exchange between humans and game-species' spirits) can be realized by wild game.

Our examples also show that this attitude of belief involves ascribing a kind of willfulness, or even a subjectivity, likened to that of humans, to the spirits of game-species. But in the meantime, they show that the mental abilities attributed to these spirits and to those of the dead's souls are limited. Human vitality is the only possible counterpart to game (therefore, there is no metaphorical counterpart), but the spirits are thought to be indifferent to the quantity and the timing of the delivery of this counterpart. As for the souls of the dead, they are thought to lack the ability to decipher the metaphors on which euphemisms and the offering of substitutes are based. Altogether, it is as if metaphorical structuring was, in the realm of thought, what cunning is in the realm of action: a human peculiarity. However, this metaphorical structuring itself has limits: a Siberian shaman cannot sing to a dead person's soul that he makes him a food

11. Luca (1994, I: 129–34, 154–157; II: 448–49). Unfortunately, these parts were not included in the book drawn from this thesis (Luca 1997).

offering without having a tangible object he calls a food offering to hand, and indeed intends for him: the mere "saying that we do" cannot replace a "doing."[12]

PLAY AND RITE, GAME AND SPORT IN THE LIGHT OF METAPHOR AND MARGIN

The fact that an "effect" is still expected from the Games nowadays, even if only defined in negative terms, is enough to ensure the ongoing belief in the need to play; if an accident (or an illness) were to occur, it would still be possible to say that it would have been even worse had the casualty or the ill person not attended the Games. All in all, our examples, taken as a whole, suggest a continuum with no true border between play and rite, a continuum marked by a latent rituality of play. Playing is always liable to be credited with a potential "effect," whatever its degree of ritualization. Throwing jacks with no specific intent can suddenly, in the light of the configuration obtained, trigger an expectation; it then acquires the value of a rite through its possible impact on empirical reality, without having been ritualized at all, given its informality. Conversely, performed on a stage, a "dance of the capercaillie" with a formalized choreography will not, for the most part, create any expectation whatsoever among the audience: ritualization is not necessarily a factor of rituality, and can sometimes even stop the latent rituality from showing.

Besides, while we can say that a game always has the potential value of a rite, the symmetrical and opposite assertion is false. There is no process that is to "rite" what "playing" is to "play"; hence, in the absence of a verb, there can be a differentiation only between "rite event" and "play event." As for me, I do not agree with Lévi-Strauss when he writes: "ritual is also 'played'" ([1962] 1966: 30). While rite, like play, obviously appears to be structured as a metaphor, it opposes equally obviously the idea that its outcome could be unexpected (unless it is a play-type rite, like those of our examples). Quite the contrary, a rite of worship is defined by the observance of rules: the "effect" expected from it is, in principle, subject to compliance with these rules, and the first accusation in the event of an unfortunate incident occurring later on will always be one of "ritual misconduct." It is not that there is no possible margin in the implementation

12. However, one can sing that one offers a goat while offering a flour figurine shaped as a goat.

of rules; many rites of worship are in fact performed in an approximate fashion, and they are acknowledged as valid, despite truncations or substitutions.[13] But it is through the space allotted to this margin for realization that rite conflicts with play: in rite (worship-type), everything is done to ignore it (except for making it the cause of a failure afterward), whereas in play (and play-type rite), everything is done to take advantage of it. It is thanks to this margin that one can play "better," and thus win or obtain a positive internal sanction.[14] The expected "effect" of a worship-type rite reflects its normative and rationalized aspect, which also explains its solemnity and holiness. By contrast, that expected of play reflects the contingency of its proceedings within the frame of play.

This does not really apply to sports, on two counts. On the one hand, sport focuses on the individuals' physical aptitude. While it instills the values associated with it,[15] it utilizes them for themselves, regardless of their potential representational properties: for this reason, it is stripped of the preparatory and cognitive functions metaphorical structuring bestows on *play*. On the other hand, while sport tends to always further rationalize the way of playing, thereby always reducing the margin, it never suppresses it in fact: otherwise there would be nothing to decide between the competitors.

We may now more precisely reinterpret the concrete definition of playing as "a rhythmical movement in a limited space referring to another realm of reality" in the abstract, through the concepts of "margin" and "metaphor"—likewise, a factor of flexibility and a both constrained and, so to speak, shifting type of structure. Just as the interdependence between the two elements of the concrete definition allowed us to account for the various dimensions of the act of playing, the interdependence between margin and metaphor may help us to grasp the various semantic uses of this notion; we can thus better understand why

13. Let us recall this famous example of the Nuer replacing an ox with a cucumber in the sacrificial ritual described by Evans-Pritchard (1940). And the extreme case of a baptism aboard a sinking ship in the absence of a priest: a sign of the cross performed by a Christian can suffice to validate it. (On the topic of substitution, see also Hamayon 2015.)

14. And it really is in this respect that, in Siberia, the type of shamanic ritual to obtain luck for hunting differs from the ritual based on sacrifice and prayer that the elders offer to the ancestors.

15. Alain Ehrenberg sees in sports the manifestation of a general relation to existence, a "school of life." According to this author, after banning religious education from schools in 1882, the French state developed physical activities in order to instill the values previously taught by religious practice (Ehrenberg 1991).

it is always so tempting and so difficult at the same time either to liken or to distinguish play(ing) and related notions such as rite and sport, and why they so often overlap.

But that is not all. The combined utilization of margin and metaphor also helps us to understand the relation between the decline of the theme of play and the development of those of ritual and sport, on the one hand, and the blossoming of the star concept of "symbolic function" in anthropological researches since the middle of the twentieth century. It may also help to refine the reasons for the parallel drawn between a player's and a believer's attitude: both may take a metaphor more or less literally and enjoy latitude in their involvement in the corresponding action. Finally, it essentially contributes to explain the existence of the gap that allows play to be a modality of action that is not identical to that action.

In Conclusion

The time has come to review this book's approach and the paths it has opened up. Its primary intent was to account for a distant observation: some cultures, among them the Mongol and Siberian peoples, called their national holiday "Games," and through them they conveyed the ideals upon which their worldview was based. Could this be the same "play" notion as the rather depreciatory one of the West, spontaneously associating amusement, frivolity, and childhood? As the analysis of the existing approaches attests, these associations hold a significant place in many theoretical works; and only a few ever question them. I thus had to list the existing approaches, and uncover the reasons for this depreciatory view of play, which seemed, a priori, unfit for our own examples. These reasons stemmed, at least partly, from a nascent Christianity's long line of rebukes toward the ancient Roman Circus Games, and those that followed, almost up until the Renaissance. Yet these Circus Games shared a trait with the Siberian Games: they were a collective manifestation of utmost social and political importance. Laying out the approaches led to an odd observation. As if to reinforce the idea, precisely, that the theme of play was far too insignificant, anthropology had forsaken it to the benefit of other themes, deemed to be "more serious," such as sport, ritual, or theater. This very diversification is what drew my attention to play as a theme abandoned by research. Could I find it under the guise of these "more serious" modes, and show that it shared elements with them?

Given the great variety of facts and approaches, I made a threefold choice. First of all, I chose to analyze not game and games, but playing: in other words, I neglected the events in order to question the process. And I made the related choice to not give up on the prospect of finding, at least in our baseline examples, something to justify the idea that there does exist a "unity of play" as a process, beyond the "diversity of games" to which it leads (as Caillois had put it in 1957), and of the themes with which it interferes. Both these choices could rely on Bateson's definition of play as a context "in which the constituent acts have a different sort of relevance and organization from that which they would have had in non-play." This negative definition paved the way for an approach to play as a process. It promised to be an effective conceptual tool, because it permitted the characterization of this process in opposition to what it was not, and because of the existence of a distance (or a gap) between it and what it could be in another realm of reality. It thus provided a relevant starting point, not only for an analysis of play as a specific *modality of action* subject to a great variety of realizations, but also from which to assess its particular relationship to empirical reality. As for the third choice, it followed logically from the previous ones. While the latter drove me toward a variety of perspectives—it is in the nature of a *modality of action* that it should manifest itself in various ways—I still had to define the specificity of each one, and pinpoint their links. In this way, it became possible to consider the existence of a single concept of play and the inevitable fragmentation of its manifestations at the same time. It became possible, for instance, not to separate the "play" of the child's education from that of the actor's mime, or of the sportsman's competition. Furthermore, most of the questions fueling the recurring debates would thus lose their raison d'être, such as that of the opposition of play to seriousness or work, or of its presumed "free and gratuitous" aspect.

Picking out the dimensions of play presented two difficulties. The first was to define which dimensions characterized play while still embracing the full magnitude of the problems it posed. The second was due to the fact that these various dimensions are not necessarily actualized all at the same time. I had to consider them, therefore, as potentialities, and, in order to do so, identify the principles which bring them about. I had to ask myself how one such dimension depended on, or was independent of, another. Our baseline examples provided a veritable laboratory: the Games organized by the societies of the areas studied were rich in significant, yet gradual, variations in both time and space. Certainly, they were a public celebration, and thus expressed a particularly broad notion

of play. But did that mean we should dispense with their richness? Any method of analysis has the right to call upon all necessary examples, in order to both unleash and put to the test numerous and general hypotheses. Our Games represented the widest possible field of implementation of the play notion in this area of the world. Not only did they comprise a great number of relevant dimensions of play, thus making it of secondary importance that all those present in the Games were not to be found in private or smaller manifestations. Comparing manifestations of varying breadth and reach proved to be most illuminating; as was, it turned out, the possibility to take a comparative look at the Roman Circus Games. But in addition to that, being so well documented across a long period marked by all kinds of ups and downs, our Games could not fail to reveal some evolutionary differences in the various dimensions, nor to shed light on the nature of these changes that befall them.

The nature of the data forced me to start the investigation into the dimensions of play with those involving the human body. The descriptions of the Games in the societies I studied, and the etymology of the terms used in many languages of different families, did indeed refer to movement. It seemed all the more natural to emphasize this bodily dimension, since playing is unanimously acknowledged as being universal,[1] and, what is more, common to both man and animal. Not to mention that it is generally assumed that one should cite a biological foundation to account for a phenomenon, the worldwide expansion of which no diffusionism can explain. The investigation into the body's involvement in play fulfilled my expectations, insofar as it encouraged me to examine its imitative components, on the one hand, and its preparatory function, on the other. Imitation is modeled on wild animal species, for which the union of the sexes is subject to selection between males. As for the preparatory function, this translates into the expectation of an "effect" from the Games upon empirical reality, and hence confers on them a value analogous to that of a rite. Moreover, it shows the existence, in the play operating in the Games, of a vast cognitive dimension; shifting the imitated model toward humans, on both a collective and individual level: playing is perceived as an oriented act, emphasizing and favoring virility. Therefore, the Games are to be seen as a multipurpose structure of interaction. They are indeed the frame of key interactions for the perpetuation of human life in its environment: between human participants, between humans on one side and animals

1. Even though this concept's expression and outline vary from one language to the other.

and their spirits on the other, and finally between living humans and their dead. Their investigation allowed us to uncover the nuances distinguishing the various purposes of acting upon the other: one can play to make people participate in an action on a third party; play to divert their attention under the guise of distracting them; play to prevail over them thanks to nonphysical properties.[2]

Playing also means giving these interactions a dramatic representation, and the latter has a performative aspect: participants believe it has the power to positively influence empirical reality. This prospect requires that they demonstrate their joy and personal commitment throughout. The cheerfulness of the Games thus proves to be conventional rather than spontaneous. It should be interpreted as the emotional translation of an act of belief conceived as self-fulfilling. It shows that playing can constitute a statement of positive anticipation destined to trigger commitment. A new aspect of play then emerges. It escapes the sphere of interaction, because it implies the impossibility of identifying an "other," partner or opponent, with whom to interact. It presents itself as a factor of individual empowerment. And above all, it opens up the vast field of "luck." Upon inquiry, this notion appears to be the leader of a fundamental semantic series, at the crossroads of politics and religion, requiring projection over time. Of this series, whose opposite pole is the notion of providence, only luck appears to be linked to play; it hence provides an indicator of the limits of the exercise of play as a modality of action. The path of luck as a way of handling indeterminacy can also be a differentiating factor between individuals, and therefore a way of acquiring a charismatic form of power. But the main path for differentiation is that of competition, which provides an image of hierarchical ranking, and of rationalization involving the implementation of mental abilities. In fact, competition assumes an increasingly dominant role in our Games, as society becomes more complex and adopts a centralizing power, echoing in original fashion Arthur Hocart's famous observation that "the brain workers supplant the manual workers as the controlling body"[3] in the exercise of power when a society grows more complex (1936: 124). This increasing place given over to competition also confirms that the orientation of the play notion, and the privilege it grants virility, actually operate on the scale of society as a whole.[4]

2. I focused on the types of interaction I encountered in my data. That is to say, I did not tackle games of chance or gambling: they fall under another study.
3. Hocart continues: "The king's secretaries oust the king's serjeants" (ibid.).
4. We are currently seeing an overwhelming growth of competition and gamification. The greatest successes are championships, matches, or the Top 5 of this or that. Music

Here is an incentive to study two underlying principles *in abstracto*, the reciprocal interaction of which seems able to characterize play: a movement in a limited space implying a certain relationship to alterity. These principles and their interactions can be further assessed through two notions: that of margin, or latitude, which pertains to the vocabulary of play as a condition for the exercise of movement; and that of metaphorical structuring, which is akin to this vocabulary, in that it explains the almost unlimited aspect of its possible uses;[5] used to think one thing in the terms of something else, it is seen as a means for structuring the gap with this "something else."

Some perspectives have crossed all the studied dimensions. First, that of gap or distance, liable to characterize play as a "modality of action." Some movements seem to be a constituent part of a play-frame from the simple fact that they stand out when compared with their equivalents in a nonplay frame: dance, for instance, in that it is not walking, and wrestling, in that it is not combat. Combined, dancing and wrestling represent the very essence of the Games in their most ancient state within the societies considered. But thereafter, dancing comes to be excluded from them, while types of games with no equivalents in ordinary life are included, without these changes in composition preventing the Games from remaining Games, considered as bearers of a potential "effect" upon empirical reality. We have no choice but to note that, over time, these Games have asserted their position as an autonomous fictional frame, untainted by any reference to any kind of reality whatsoever, without this autonomy stopping them from having the value of a rite. Therefore, it is not a mere gap, reducible to Huizinga's "no doing in the ordinary sense," that characterizes play, but rather a sum of successive gaps, finally abolishing any traceable link to any kind of ordinary type of action. Only the gap itself matters, namely the need for play to remain a modality of action not identical to that action.

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and dance still exist, but are usually subject to rankings and contests. A "competitive spirit" and "cult of achievement" dominate around the world. In an important book he dedicates to this theme, Ehrenberg "depicts the world of sports as the magnifying glass of societal evolutions," according to Richard Robert's (2012) expression. Gamification is also to be found everywhere; whether we are buying a washing powder, or installing an application on a smartphone, we are rewarded with a point or a badge. The incentive to buy, scratch, or click with the implicit promise of extra earnings is relentless.

5. While, generally speaking, playing is primarily perceived as gestural, it poses no issues in comprehension if it is used in a political speech, or in a pleasant conversation, about sales negotiations or transactions at the stock market. There can be metaphors on several consecutive levels, allowing us (or not) to make similar inferences.

The angle of the use of fiction also recurs throughout these pages. For as far back as their history goes, our Games aim at creating a fictional realm in order to act on something otherwise indeterminable. A perfect example of this is "luck" in hunting. From this point of view also, the mechanism outlives the disappearance of what may have given birth to it: only fiction can create the illusion of acting in the absence of a rational means to do so by letting individual agency run wild. This is not only because there are so many domains in which there is no other choice than to "try one's luck," but, more profoundly, because anything can become an opportunity to do so: the combined utilization of the notions of margin and metaphor makes an infinite renewal possible.

Lastly, this leads me to put forward a slightly risky perspective: that of the place a society affords to play from this angle of calling upon luck. Let us draw a brief comparison from our examples of the Games and their central position in society. While Christian prohibitions put an end to Circus Games in ancient Rome, it took much longer to fully discredit play in the West. The main instrument of this was the gradual separation of our two kinds of games, which were generally reoriented either toward military arts, then sports, or toward the art of good manners, and then pedagogy. This separation deprived these games, if not of all sacrality and rituality, then at least of any acknowledged sacrality and rituality. In the meantime, untying the links binding the political and religious spheres, it freed the games from their mutual constraints, and pushed them toward ever further specialization and innovation. Thus, the splitting up of play into autonomous games in the West appeared as related and conducive to nascent modernity. In Siberia, the Games have remained the highest ranked collective demonstration on the political scale in society, but their composition, dominated by the ideal of competition, no longer reflects the interaction between opposition games and complementarity games. Their rituality has remained, but without any religious referent. Their main reach and meaning is national identity, as is the case with most sporting events worldwide, in particular since the establishment of the Olympic Games.

Overall, in our contemporary context, play does not really benefit from a formal appreciation other than in two extreme cases. At the highest collective level, it expresses itself mainly in physical forms,[6] and is highly ritualized, and devoid

6. I thank Damien Simon for this comment: even in nonphysical contests, such as poker games broadcast on TV—and this is noteworthy—bluff is conveyed mainly by bodily moves.

of religious references: physical games, requiring a strong engagement involving the whole body, represent a conspicuous support for local and national identity claims everywhere in the world. By contrast, neither the play of diplomacy, nor that of financial speculation, is entitled to such an appreciation or ritualization. At an individual level, however, play(ing) manifests chiefly in nonphysical forms. As the very image of innovation, individual games usually call for informality. Nonetheless, their rampant development in the virtual realm sees the spark of rituality rearing its head once more. However, virtual games, requiring above all mental skills, give rise to multiple independent networks involving groups of individuals who show little interest in questions of transcendental ideologies or national identity.

So then, are we done with playing?

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